

A VikingPunk Tale

by BlackRose108

Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Adventure, Drama

Language: English

Characters: Astrid, Hiccup, Toothless

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-04-10 04:17:27

Updated: 2015-05-10 00:55:09

Packaged: 2016-04-26 13:23:53

Rating: T

Chapters: 23

Words: 185,335

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Mythical AU. Toothless is a legendary Night Fury with a dangerous past and a doomed future. Hiccup is a Viking Prince whose destiny challenges his right to the throne. And Astrid is a girl disguised as a boy who's duty is to protect them both. Together the unlikely trio must save their unappreciative world from the dark fate of mythical lore.

1. Prevented and Rebellious

**Here's to the start of my next big project! This is the first multi-chapter story I've written for this fandom, and I'm excited to get my feet wet in exploring these characters. **

So since the title and the description are pretty vague, I'll just run it by that this is **_*not*_ a steampunk story. It's called "A VikingPunk Tale" because of the fact that this story combines the movie universe, the book universe, and real Viking mythology, making the world this story takes place in "Viking Punk". Also, even though Hiccup and Toothless are the main characters listed for this story, Astrid plays just as big a role as a main character. So, if I could have three characters, it would definitely be Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid equally, but this site only allows two characters.**

But, if you're looking for a sappy romantic story, this isn't gonna be it. I'm really gonna focus on character development and story more so than anything. This statement alone doesn't mean romance can't find its way in the story, though. Just remember, romance is in the storyâ€|but, romance **_*isn't*_ the story.**

**Moving on to the setting, I've made the Vikings more of a network of island villages to make up one big Viking Kingdom. So there are more villages than just Berk, such as Astrid's village. But, Berk is the main village where the Viking royal family lives. So, yes, in this story Hiccup is a real prince, and is addressed in the title Prince Hiccup, or Young Prince Haddock. Also, even though in the

movie and books, women were just as equal as men, I'm going with real 11****th**** century Viking standards and making it so woman had those "age old" duties of being baby making machines and leaving the defenses to the men.**

But, I think that's enough of an opening note for right now. Onwards to chapter one!

Part One: We Are Challenging Fate

Chapter One: Prevented and Rebellious

His room was the shield to his fiery world. But not of his own accordâ€|it was of his father, the King.

Princes weren't supposed to be out when the town was burning and dangerous dragons flew rampant around the main village of Berk. At least, not princes like him.

Princes like Hiccup Haddock III, the hope and heir to the Viking Kingdom. No one had that hope in him, though. He was sure of that. All the hope to the real ruling went to his cousin, Snotlout. And, as usual, Snotlout was out in the raid fighting and being a hero, while Hiccup was locked in his room sketching, sleeping, covering his ears from the loud explosionsâ€|but never being scared.

Princes like Hiccup were small, skinny, weak looking at most, but not scared. He wanted to get out there. Face the dangers Vikings laughed at in a hearty insanity. To prove himself and spill the blood of a dragon he killed with a blade all his own. But first, his father had to let him out in the first place.

Hiccup let out a sigh and collapsed onto the bed of his room. He looked up at the models of flying machines he constructed. "Those aren't possible" he could hear his father say, but what else was Hiccup supposed to do? He dreamed, he thought of things, he envisioned, and he built. Not Viking enough, though. Vikings didn't dream, they went after what they wanted, and more importantly, they got what they wanted. There was no reason to dream with those mindsets.

The models jostled and the room shook, a small wake of dust falling into his eyes. It was either a Zippelback or a Nadder, he figured. A Gronckle or a Nightmare wouldn't climb up on a roof. No, they'd barge right in. And it wouldn't be the first time a dragon had made its way into the castle. Once or twice they'd even made it to Hiccup's room.

He sat up at that noise, a smile crossing his lips. A little excitement never hurt anyone, unless, of course, he got burned again. He looked at his left shoulder, the red flesh was sure to stay for quite some time. And getting a burn would've certainly been cooler if Snotlout hadn't had to come and save him.

"Prince Hiccup, I brought you a fresh bedspread." His maid, Arte, walked in, a blanket of cheer over her scarred voice. The palace was rumbling due to the many dragons that flew about in the early morning, and no doubt Hiccup's father sent her in there to more or less keep an eye on him. Hiccup raised a brow, behind Arte the door was open and he could see the guards rushing about frantically,

trying to keep everything calm and safe.

But the door was open.

"Oh, um, yes Arte. I was just about to wake up, so a fresh bedspread would be fine." Hiccup answered stately, getting up from his bed and not even caring that he was in his sleeping tunic and pants. Arte had been his maid for as long as he could remember, and she had seen him in far less appropriate clothing.

Just to his liking, Arte smiled and walked up to his bed, taking off the old spread and preparing the new one. But, she had neglected to close the door completely behind her. Hiccup never heard the click that he was so used to when he father had the guards lock the door even without him knowing. He knew that click down to a tee by then.

Quickly he pulled on his fur boots and slipped near the door checking once more that Arte was occupied.

Hiccup smirked. If his father was going to keep from the fight, than he just had to keep proving that a little thing like a locked door couldn't keep him from his fate as the next strong fighting king of the Viking Kingdom.

Hiccup slipped between the door and ran deftly between the large pillars around the palace. He had made this maneuver many times before. Go from pillar to pillar and the guards wouldn't notice. Especially since they were thinking more about finding dragons that had made their way into the palace than figuring the useless prince had snuck out of his room. Again. It would only become a problem if Hiccup was to be attacked, but he made a promise to himself that this time this time he'd make a name for himself.

The back door would be his way of escape, for the front door was no doubt swarmed with guards, dragons trying to enter, and his father. The fierce and strong king Stoick the Vast whom always stood at the threshold of palace entrance, his axe in hand and fire crisping his cape as he defended his palace.

Hiccup swallowed at the thought as he ran. That's what he would be one day, everyone would look to him for protection and he would finally be treated like the prince he always wanted to be. The prince he was, but somehow wasn't.

The back door was in sight, and Hiccup smiled as he saw that it was unguarded. The door was usually guarded, but during raids like these, it was simply blocked by a bar of wood in front and left completely bare to young princes who were supposed to be locked in their rooms.

He carefully lifted the wooden bar, thought heavier than it looked, his determination made it a plausible task. And when he lifted the hinge and smelled that first wind of smoked air it was the last thing on his mind to have a gronckle fly right into the door.

It was a young gronckle anything bigger wouldn't have fit through the door and it's small wings and large body mass proved for a clumsy and certainly angered mess flying through the palace, spitting fire and knocking into pillars.

"Gronckle in the palace!" Hiccup heard one of the guards scream.

"It's in the north-west wing!"

Hiccup literally cursed himself. But it wasn't over yet. Okay, a gronckle was in the palace, there had been dragons inside before, but this could be his time to finally get it out. He pulled out the dagger from his inner boot pocket and ran towards the dragon, it was smashing into pillars and blowing fireballs and every guard that came it's way.

He ran upwards towards the dragon, focus pulsing from his heart throughout his entire body. The dagger his father had gave him to protect himself has never pierced flesh before, but all Hiccup could remember hearing from all the warriors in the village was that killing left a strange high of power within them. The thought alone, though, only left Hiccup with nervousness.

Killing. It was a common word, a state of mind really, with Vikings. But the thought always left a bad taste in his mouth.

And Hiccup always figured it was because he had never actually killed something. But now was his chance.

He got the best grip he could on the dagger with his sweating hands before he let out the best battle cry he could possibly muster. All the guards turning to see Hiccupâ€"who clearly wasn't in his room.

But a perfectly timed shot of fire broke Hiccup's stride completely. His dagger was ripped from his hand and pinned to the pillar behind him. Unarmed and on a strange high of anticipation Hiccup stood frozen.

::_Humansâ€|_:: Hiccup heard faintly within his mind as the dragon stared at him, like a hissing whisper. And it made his blood boil. Whatever it was, it was a mock.

Another battle cry entered the scene soon enough, though. And, regrettably enough, Hiccup knew that cry anywhere.

It was King Stoick leaving his post at the front of the palace to defend his _poor, defenseless _son from being killedâ€|.again.

Stoick swung an axe at the dragon, cutting it's leg in a taut slice of flesh before the dragon let out a cry.

:: _Humanâ€|painâ€|::_, Hiccup heard again. A fist clenched at his heart. He had never seen his father battle a dragon this closely before. Someone had always come to retrieve him to someplace "safe" before he could get such a better look. But the fire burned in his vision as his father shielded himself from fire blast, and alternatively defended himself with perfected axe swings. Slicing even more flesh, drawing even more blood, and tightening the fist over Hiccup's heart as he heard screams of pain, but none of which belonged to anyone he could see.

::: Pain :::

The young gronckle knocked into a pillar before making a run for it. It's blood spilled shamelessly about the floors as it flew for the back door, but more guards came and surrounded it, throwing ropes to its neck and legs, tying it down and forcing it's flapping wings to buzz to no avail.

"Shall we kill is King Stoick?" One of the guards asked.

Stoick gave the dragon a hard look, it's whimpers of pain were perfectly audible, but Stoick only smiled.

"We need another gronckle for the training ring, take it there." He ordered promptly, and the guards quickly scrambled for the carrying net, dragging the gronckle across the floor in shame and having its blood mark it path to its prison.

::: Trapped :: Hiccup heard another snatch of feeling a desperation for freedom still clenching in his mind, but he wasn't sure if it was his own._ :: Sadnessâ€|:::_

And all together as soon as the dragon left his range of sense, the clench was lifted, and his mind was cleared. He shook his head, walking over to the pillar to retrieve his dagger before a large hand slammed against the pillar before he could grab it.

"What in Thor's name were you thinking, Hiccup!?" Stoick yelled. It was an age old script in Hiccup's mind. He had heard this conversation too many times for him to be sane while it played over again. "You're supposed to be _in your room_!"

"I'm always supposed to be in there, Dad!" Hiccup yelled back. "Why don't you just put me in prison and give me _all_ the benefits of being locked up!"

"I put you in there to keep you safe. A raid is no place near where you need to be." Stoick told him in a hiss, his voice was low and tired, but Hiccup still had a fire in his eyes.

"I'm the prince, Dad. When are you going to let me act like one!?"

"When you learn your place!" Stoick screamed. He had said this before, of course. It had all been said before. But hearing it echo across the pillars of the palace, bounce off the high ceiling, and rack Hiccup's brain. It made him sick and shaken.

Stoick watch Hiccup stand before him in defeat once again. There was an odd glisten in his eyes at his son and he looked up at the burned pillar behind him, pulling the dagger from it.

"This dagger belonged to you mother." Stoick told him softly, flicking a charred speck from the metal.

"I know." Hiccup whispered. His mother was just as much as a figure as his father. A fierce quest-maiden, and a feared ruler alongside Stoick. She was a woman, of course, but had all the respect and power as any man. Hiccup admired her a great deal, she had fought dragons and enemies with an unbreakable force of will and brains. Yet, going

on her first quest after having Hiccup was when they'd get the news that she would never return at the hand of a dragon.

He swallowed at the mention of her.

"It's fought in many battles." Stoick continued. "Taken many lives." He placed the dagger back in Hiccup's hands, a weapon that looked so small in his mother's hands seemed so big in his. Stoick sighed. "But just because it has that history doesn't mean you have to act out of your place."

"Then why give it to me?"

"Because you're my son!" Stoick began to turn away, but looked at Hiccup once more. "And I know you all too well."

"Dad!" Hiccup made a half-effort in calling out.

"Hiccup," Stoick turned completely back to him, placing the dagger within a holding gesture in Hiccup's hands. "When you carry this dagger," he started. "You carry all of us with you." He gave Hiccup a stern look. "Me, your mother's entire Kingdom. It's by means of protection and pride that you use it, not recklessly putting yourself in danger to prove something you can't do."

The words stung hard. Can't do, It wasn't the first time his father had told him he wasn't going to be the dragon killer he always wanted to be, but it still hurt every time he said so.

And with that, his fur cape and all the spikes that shown on his entire whipped away. The guards where left to escort Hiccup back to his room, and he was told to be to the Meade hall of the palace in an hour, no doubt for the reports that always came to follow right after a raid.

Hiccup hated dressing up. He wore his red scaled tunic with a black vest over it, all of which tied at the waist with a belt carrying the Haddock's royal dragon crest. And, of course, he had to wear the crest about his shoulder wrapped cape, that wasn't made of furs like his father's. Hiccup often would've loved to take a nap within in the soft cotton of his cape during report meetings. Napping was certainly better than listening to the damage done to the village, or the snickers of the warriors at Hiccup's less than princely physique. And certainly more exciting than jotting down his father's to-do-list, the only thing Stoick could think for Hiccup to do so he wasn't completely useless during the meetings.

He always felt on display at those types of affairs nonetheless. Hiccup would simply sit in his chair adjacent to his father, trying to look princely even though he knew he always failed miserably while he took his notes on what repairs and jobs needed to be done.

"We only had two Nightmares this time around," Spitelout, the second in command, reported. He stood tall and at attention in front of Stoick, the King's Warrior's standing proudly behind Spitelout as he spoke. "But their fire still spilled over downwind. Eastern and over about seven homes."

"We'll need repairs on that, as soon as the fires are put out." Stoick reported, looking over to Hiccup, who, of course was jotting

in his book accordingly. "We'll need about fourteen home repairers on the job, son, two per house." Stoick added, and Hiccup sighed, writing it down.

"On another note, King Stoick," Spitelout added. "I must commend my son, Snotlout, who I am proud to report fought mercilessly today. He killed both of the Nightmares and four Gronckles." Snotlout took a stand proudly next to his father, a smug smile about his face as everyone clapped.

Hiccup rolled his eyes. Snotlout might as well have been the prince instead of the prince's cousin. He was the strong, merciless fighter everyone expected Hiccup to be, only he wasn't the hope and heir to the kingdom. At least not yet.

Snotlout already had the most metals upon his warrior's cape than any of the other, and Hiccup had no doubt he'd only continue to get more. Being a strong Viking wasn't the problem Hiccup had with Snotlout, though.

It was his smirk.

Snotlout wanted the throne, he had royal blood, and he was the picture of everything Hiccup was supposed to be. Hiccup's odds of becoming king with his lack of respect and praise were definitely not in his favor, and although it wasn't common, if a better suited cousin was in the picture, the throne was still up for free grabs.

Snotlout was awarded with another metal that day, filling his cape proudly, and after Stoick knighted both of Snotlout's shoulders Hiccup had to do so as well, though it was more for the show and propriety of it all than the actual honor.

"Get those notes to the repairers lodge, Hiccup." Stoick ordered promptly after the report was finished. "And make sure the news presenters have the stats from this raid."

"Yes, father." Hiccup stood from his chair and made quick steps towards the door. His dagger was placed in a gold case strapped to his waste sash, and when his cape flowed out as he walked past Snotlout and laughed.

"Still carrying around the show dagger, huh?" Snotlout asked. Hiccup stopped dead in his tracks, but didn't dare make eye contact. "Just go run your little errands, Prince Hiccup."

Hiccup stood frozen as he let Snotlout's words absorb into him despite himself. His fist clenched the sides of his cape and his eyes glistened with anger. Snotlout only stood behind him, and Hiccup didn't need to turn around to know that that smirk of his was there. It was always there.

And with that, Hiccup walked off in a flow of cloth cape and clacking boots. But as he heard Snotlout laugh and leave, he heard metal clanking, the metals upon Snotlout's cape made for a much more impressive display of leave than Hiccup's.

And in an ironic turn of events, that somehow Hiccup wasn't surprised, for he realized that he snuck out of his room that morning

hoping to make a name for himself, but instead he just rejuvenated his old one.

Prince Hiccupâ€|the Useless.

Astrid hated bread.

She hated it with a passion everyone morning she woke up and had to go to work. But what else was a bread maiden supposed to feel about bread?

Ever since Astrid was twelve her mother sent her to work in the bread kitchens. Anything to keep her from "rolling around in the dirt", as her mother said. Though Astrid hardly rolled around. She was practicing. Target practice, summersault practice, and learning how to hold any weapon she could get her hands on.

That wasn't the job for a woman, though. She wasn't to have scars and mud caked clothes. She was to look presentable and attractive to the men around her at all times so a sure marriage was in the future. A woman with no sure marriage at sixteen might as well just commit suicide, after all.

Astrid had only one year left, and it certainly wasn't her looks that had kept her from getting a man interested, but it was her attitude. Playing hard to get was one thing, but actually not wanting to be gotten was another entirely.

It was times like those when Astrid wished she had been born like her brother Atlas. A man. She could fight and protect and be who she was instead of baking bread and baring her belly and legs to attract men. But her mother simply wouldn't have that. No, she'd bake bread and keep baring herself for the next year until she found a man willing to take her. That wasn't just the fate of the women in the village of Merkskof, but of all Viking women, even ones in the royal isle of Berk.

"The news presentation should be here soon," Ruffnut told her, kneading some dough before she pulled another one of her braids into her hair tie. Ruffnut, on the other hand, was quite an attraction to the men of her village of Merkskof, and her only problem was picking one. Ruffnut enjoyed messing with men's emotions, and Astrid was sure she had already given up her purity, but that was something she wished not to discuss, and Ruffnut didn't seem to want to tell. Her and Ruffnut were hardly what she'd call "best friends" but when it came to the only girl in Merkskof who didn't whisper behind her back, Ruffnut was a breath of fresh air.

"Really? That's today!?" Astrid perked up. The news presentation was one of the few times she was able to hear about her brother, who was serving as a warrior to King Stoick in Berk. Ruffnut's twin brother Tuffnut was serving as a warrior as well, but he was off questing rather than protecting the royal isle.

"Yeah, the men should be coming in before dusk." Ruffnut got back to her bread, but Astrid simply couldn't concentrate after that. Being able to hear about her brother's heroics was the only bright spot in Astrid's otherwise dull life. The only thing that would be better was being able to see him again, but men were posted for years on end before they could visit home, and Atlas had already been gone for two

years.

The news presentation itself was a ritual of sorts among the neighboring Viking isles. Men from the Berk were circulate the islands on ships, gathering news and presenting it to everyone so they knew what was going on. Raids, drafts, weather, and the statistics of the warriors.

Everyone was to look their best during the presentations, though Astrid never knew why. Still, she put on her best clothes so her mother wouldn't complain, for she simply just wasn't in the mood for it that night.

"Astrid, pull up you shirt a wee bit." Her mother ordered. "You know all the men will be at the presentation. You must lookâ€" "

"Attractive. Yes, mother, I know." Astrid rolled her eyes, but didn't make any quick movements to roll her up her shirt anymore than it already was. She hated that her body was some kind of bargaining tool for her mother.

"Evening, everyone!" One of the presenters announced. "We have come with news of a vast amount of dragon raids sweeping the royal isle."

Astrid felt her mother swallow, knowing very well that Berk was Atlas's post.

"Warrior Duke Snotlout was honored with his sixth metal of bravery." The announcer continued, and Astrid began to yawn. She had heard far too much of the Warrior Duke Snotlout Haddock, nephew to the king and surely the next in line to the throne even though he wasn't the prince. Astrid found herself snorting in a laugh. The real prince was about as useful as a pile of dragon dung. It was almost impossible to believe that Prince Hiccup was the son of King Stoick, or of his mother Queen Valhallarama.

But, Astrid was filled with a swell of determination every time she heard of Valhallarama. She was the only woman Viking who could quest and fight and rule with an iron fist and no one ever said a word about it. She didn't have to bare her skin or hide the fact that she was more than just her hips and her breasts. Astrid looked down at her chestâ€"there wasn't much there as it was anyways.

"In sadder news," the announcer said. "We do have reports from the raids of deaths among our fearless warriors." He opened a scroll and continued to read. "Gothor Jenson, Rengard Ruinfer, Atlas Hofferson, Hoger Grimsworâ€|. "

Astrid never paid too much attention to the death statuses, even though her brother served on the royal isle, she knew he would never be on that roster. The only time his name was mentioned was when he earned another metal

But thenâ€|

"Atlas Hofferson," she heard the announcer say. And any doubt she had that she had really heard her older brother's name on the death roster were obliterated when she saw her mother sink down to the

floor and curse every god for taking her son away from her.

Astrid and her mother were given Atlas's axe as one of his many possessions sent back to Merkskof, but it didn't make the hole in Astrid's hear any smaller. She kept the axe as her own, leaving it near her bed and holding it for comfort whenever she remember Atlas's words before he was shipped off to Berk.

"_I know it'll seem like a century, but I will return soon enough, little sister, I promise you that much._"

She threw the axe then. It landed right in the wall, sticking perfectly in the middle jut out of habit.

"Liar," Astrid muttered between her teeth as she snuffled back tears that still fell anyways.

"Astrid," She heard her mother call in a whispered voice from the hall. "Ruffnut is here to see you."

"Tell her I'm busy." Astrid rolled over on her bed, tears still falling.

"You are obviously not busy." Her mother sniffed.

"Mother please, I'm just not in the mood for company."

"And it's that attitude that will keep you from getting married."

"Mother!" Astrid yelled. It had only been three days since the news presentation and the men were still there collecting new drafts for protection and questing warriors. But, even since they had learned of Atlas's death Astrid' mother was especially keen on getting her to marry. She only had two children and wit her 'prided' child, Atlas, gone Astrid was the only one left to carry on the Hofferson name. It was a huge burden to shoulder, and frankly, Astrid didn't know if becoming a wife and mother was what she wanted at fifteen.

She wanted to fight, to protect her people. And what's more, she wanted to avenge her brother.

Astrid's mother sent Ruffnut in anyways, who, ironically enough, had her own sob story to tell.

"You finally picked a suitor?" Astrid questioned from Ruffnut's story.

"Yeah," Ruffnut nodded. "Butâ€|"

"But you don't love him?"

"N-no, it's not that. Wellâ€|not _just_ that."

"Then what is it?" Astrid sat up. If she was going to have company she might as well allow it to get her mind off of Atlas as much as it could.

"Tuffnut's gone missing." Ruffnut said slowly. "The news presenters said his questing group went missing."

"Well, a lot of questing groups get lost at sea and always find their way back eventually." Astrid tried to brighten the mood for her. "It just takes some time."

"I knowâ€¦but they said that last time too. And the time beforeâ€¦."

"Oh," Astrid lowered her eyes and place a hand on Ruffnut's shoulder. "He's alive Ruffnut. Don't give up on that."

"I'm not." Ruffnut said strongly, she placed her hand over Astrid's, squeezing it. Astrid could feel her determination creeping into her blood, and it only made her the gears in her mind begin to turn. Astrid was reminded of how her, Atlas, Ruffnut and Tuffnut used to play together. In a way, the two were always promised to each other brothers, but things has quickly changed when they were both sent off on the warrior draft.

"I'm going to find him, Astrid." Ruffnut told her sternly, the force in her eyes was contagious and fiery, and it steamed away the tear trails plastered to Astrid's face. She sniffled and nodded, it was all becoming clear to her.

"You're going to the draft aren't you Ruff?" Astrid asked.

"Yes," Ruffnut nodded. "But, I need Atlas's axeâ€¦to cut my hair."

"Of course." Astrid got up from her bed and walked over to the axe, pulling it from the wood of the wall in one twack. She stared down at it, running her hands over the metal, and smiling sadly to herself. Nothing was more painful than knowing Atlas had held that axe with the lively vigor of his fighting spirit just a little while ago.

The fighting spirit he had passed on to her.

Atlas knew Astrid dreamed to fight. How she read the stories of the fierce warrior Queen Valhallarama and the fictions of the distant knights and fighters of other cultures. As she sat on the bed next to Ruffnut she looked down at the book she had been reading while mopping.

"The Fearless Knight, Alistair" was the name of the book. Atlas had always read it to her at a young age. Countless tales of a foreign knight who traveled the world in chainmail and carried his sword. In many ways was Atlas like Alistair in Astrid's mind. He was strong and brave and everything she hoped she could be one day.

But she could never be. Unlessâ€¦.

Ruffnut's long locks fell to the floor one by one as Astrid cut them with Atlas's axe. They were both quiet as they performed the task, for even Astrid knew how much Ruffnut loved her long hair.

But she loved her brother more. And Astrid knew that even though her and Tuffnut fought to no ends when they were around, both of them would jump through rings of fire to make sure the other was safe. Astrid could only concur, though. For she felt the same of her brother. Sadly, though, no quest to find him would ever bring Atlas

back.

Unlessâ€|. .

"There," Astrid whispered. "It's finished." Ruffnut walked up to the mirror, laughing at herself. Even Tuffnut didn't have as short of hair as her, and even though Ruffnut's hair still met her shoulders, she pulled it back into an hair tie, pulling the hair out of her face and showing that a quick cut could take her from woman to warrior. Luckilyâ€"and like Astridâ€"Ruffnut wasn't 'blessed' with a large bust either.

"I'll be leaving tonight." Ruffnut said. "Or, I suppose 'Rune Thorston' will be leaving tonight."

"Rune?" Astrid smiled a little. "Nice name."

"It was my uncle's name."

"Ohâ€|" Astrid bit her lip. She didn't exactly know what to make of the moment. Ruffnut had cut her hair and was defying laws by joining the warrior draft as a woman in disguise. But there was something oddly thrilling about it. Ruffnut was going to live her dream. So why couldn't she?

Unlessâ€|. .

Astrid looked down at the book once more, then at Atlas's axe and back. Why couldn't she? Without Ruffnut there, she'd be in the bread kitchens alone, working and listening to mother about pulling up her top. Forced on dates of every sort to hurry up and marry her off. And then she'd sleep with a man she barely knew, and bare his children.

That thought alone was enough to toss it all out the window, and in one swift move, Astrid turned the blade of her brother's axe and cut her braid straight off.

"Astridâ€|?" Ruffnut breathed, though there was no hiding the slow smile creeping across her lips. "What are youâ€|?"

"My name's not Astrid." Astrid said sternly, as she stood, her cut off braid falling completely to the floor and strands of hair cracking from her neck. "Call me Alistair."

**First chapter's in the bag! Did you like it, love it, hate it? Please let me know, cause this is gonna be a pretty long story and I need to know whether I'm planning a flop here. **

So, we've got Hiccup and Astrid having similar issues of not living up to their expected roles in society. Astrid is blatantly going against it and disguising herself as a boy to go fight like she's always wanted to. And Hiccup, well, he's royalty, so he doesn't have such a rebellious option. Yet. X3

**And as you noticed there was no Gobber and no Fishlegs. Don't worry, they are in this story, just not in the role you're all used to. This will be true of a lot of characters, they won't all be used how they were used in the book or movies since this will deviate so much from the original plots. So, for those of you thinking this just

a fancy re-telling of the movie, you're wrong. It'll take elements from it, but it will have a pace all its own, trust me. And, yes, we'll meet Toothless soon enough. **

**So, please review! If so, more chapters are coming and get comfy, cause this is gonna be a long ride. **

Also, for a sketch of Hiccup and Astrid's attire for part one, I did some quick drawings on them (just remove spaces):

**Hiccup: ** blackrose108 . deviantart # / d4vqe93

**Astrid: ** blackrose108 . deviantart art / VikingPunk " Tale " Astrid " WIP - 295163256

**Next Chapter: Assigned and Unexplainable. **

2. Assigned and Unexplainable

**So here's chapter two! **

I'm not sure what my updating schedule will be, but this came a little later than I expected. So, sorry about that.

But anyways, Astrid and Ruffnut are off on their own journeys and Hiccup gets himself into some more trouble|.and perhaps a solutionâ€|

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Two: Assigned and Unexplainable

Astrid laced her headband around her forehead, and let her bangs fall over her eyes. She preferred her hair this way, but her mother simply wouldn't allow it.

"_Have that head band pull your bangs back, Astrid._ She could hear her mother telling her. _"You want those lads to see those pretty blue eyes of yours._"

She moaned. Those 'pretty blue eyes' were sure to give her away, so it was better to have hair covering them for the moment. Ruffnut was able to pull off a scrawny boy a little better as soon as she scrunched her face, but Astridâ€"and she cursed herselfâ€"had softer features. It was going to be harder to seem manly with unbreakably girly face.

The news presenters always held a draft every time they made it to their island, calling up eligible men from the homes and shipping them off to stations that needed protection, and perhaps even being chosen to be a questing warrior. Ruffnut cross all of her fingers hoping to get her brother's position, but Astrid didn't particularly care.

Just as long as she was fighting, she would be alright.

"Names?" One of the new presenters asked. They were the last two to make it to the boats in the wee hours of the night before the ships of other draftees sailed off.

Both girls gulped before answering.

"Rune Thorston." Ruffnut said.

"And you..?"

"Alastair Hofferson." Astrid stood tall and at attention, clicking her heels.

"Hofferson?" The news presenter scribbled something down on his paper. "You know Atlas Hofferson?"

"Oh, um...yes." Astrid darted her eyes over to Ruffnut. Surely Ruffnut's brother wasn't as big a name in warrior-hood as Atlas was, and she was sure he had gone and told everyone he had a little sister. "Atlas is my cousin." Astrid spit out the first lie she could gag up to her tongue.

"Ah, well it's good to have some more Hofferson blood in the sect. Get in, lads, we're off to Berk."

And with that, Ruffnut and Astrid climbed off the soil of Merkskof as ripe women ready to be wed and slept with, and climbed into the boat as ready warriors, Rune and Alistair.

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Astrid was a little self conscious as she looked down at her chest, as was Ruffnut. Neither of them had much to scoff at as women, but as men, it was enough to give away everything.

Their outfits themselves were nothing but mixed-matched variations of the biggest and loosest clothes they could find. But Astrid still developed the habit of crossing her arms over her chest, leaning casually against the side of the boat as it rocked mercilessly. The waters weren't terribly rough, but it was enough to make her a little sea sick.

"We're men now, we've got to be used to the sea. Vikings sail after all." Astrid whispered to herself in a deep voice, and Ruffnut eyed her. As women they had never left their homeland, and never sailed for more than a few hours. But eight days out at sea, with no baths, brawny men, and small rations was beginning to get to them.

Why did the royal isle of Berk have to be so far away?

Suddenly, though, Astrid and Ruffnut's boat pulled up next to the other two.

"Alright, lads!" the captain on the first ship called out. "There's been a change of plans!"

Astrid sat up from her slumped position immediately.

"I know you were all supposed to train in Berk, but we're going to have to split you up to your stations immediately." He looked around. "Some of you will be in the Quest rank, others in the Warrior's rank."

Ruffnut sat up as well. This was it.

Astrid could look over and see Ruffnut's fingers crossing and her eyes closes, slowly speaking to herself in a silent prayer to get a Quest rank in order see her brother.

And in the muttle of names, Ruffnut's boy name was called.

"Rune Thorston, from Merkskof, the Quest rank." The captain called out, rather quickly, and continued down the list. But Ruffnut was still stuck on he rank.

Quest rank. Tuffnut's rank.

Astrid leaned over to smile at her.

"Way to go, _Rune_. " Astris emphasized. "You're on your way to finding Tuffnut."

"Alastair Hofferson, from Merkskof." The captain continued.

"Warrior's Rank. You'll be station in your cousin's platoon on Berk, so get on the main ship."

Astrid swallowed. She knew very well that she was going to Berk to trainâ€"as was everyoneâ€"but she didn't expect to be immediately placed in her brother's platoon. The King's Warriors were the best of the best. Handpicked from all the ranks to protect the Royal Isle from dragons and foreign invasions.

But it wasn't her they wanted, it was her brother's name. Hofferson. That name would automatically get her anywhere she wanted in any ranks. But if she was going to be put on that high a pedestal, she had to prove herself. Not just as a boyâ€|but as a Hofferson.

Astrid didn't get the soulful goodbye to Ruffnut that she wanted. If she was still in girl's clothing she would've at least given Ruffnut some strong final words and a hug, but instead she was quickly hoisted up to the main boat while the others went up to the Quest ranks and some of the other isles.

She was able to met Ruffnut's eyes one last time, though, and they were deep, focused. Much like hers.

"Good luck, Alastair." Ruffnut's eyes told her.

"Good luck, Rune." Astrid did her best to communicate as well. "The Quest rank is a hard row to hoeâ€|but your brother's waiting for youâ€| "

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And Hiccup was back his prison room.

Arte stayed inside with him, claiming to be there to help him with his new model, but more so in there to make sure he actually stayed in his room.

Ever since his run it with the gronckle the previous week, his father was even stricter about where he went and what he did. He was barely let out o his room past bathing and eating.

"Arte, please pass me that piece of wood over there." Hiccup said, but only looked over to find Arte pacing the floor instead. She looked on duty. Hiccup sighed and slumped against his work desk, shaking his head. "Are you my maid or my body guard?" He asked simply.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry, young Prince Haddock, I just!"

"Calm down, Arte." Hiccup stood, walking up towards her. "I'm not going to smite you or anything. It's just, you said you came in here to help me out and you're barely doing that. You just pacing the room like a dragon's lose or something."

Arte's eyes darted around. "Oh, of course not, King Stoick had nothing to do with me being here."

Hiccup could practically see each bead of sweat on her brow, but instead of point it out he just hummed.

"_Very_ convincing, Arte." Hiccup laughed a bit.

"I'm sorry, Prince Hiccup." Arte immediately bowed, but Hiccup caught her shoulder, pulling her back up. "Enough with the bowing, For as long as you've been with me you'd think you'd be a little more comfortable around me." But all he met was Arte's scarred eyes.

It was then when Hiccup shuddered at the thought of actually preferring Snotlout's company. Outside the palace, Hiccup knew the whispers and mutters about his incompetence that circulated Berk and probably the other isles. But in his presence, everyone was on their best behavior.

Oh, Young Prince Haddock. Oh, Prince Hiccup. I'm so terribly sorry. How may I serve you?

It got to be a little much after a while. And it certainly would've been more appreciated if he knew the second they turned away they didn't murmur what a disappointment he was.

Arte was no exception. But Snotlout at least he had the guts to tell him what he really thought of him to his face. It gave him a stinging feeling in his stomach whenever Snotlout spewed his judgments on him. But if it wasn't for that where would his motivation be?

And where would his victory speech be when he finally proved them all wrong?

He smirked and went back to his desk. Let Arte play the dutiful maid who talked about him behind his back, he'd show them all.

Hiccup looked down at the model on his dresser. The Mutilator.

Even though his run it with the gronckle left his father on high alert with putting Hiccup on lock down, if it wasn't for that, Hiccup wouldn't have come up with the plan to even built the contraption.

It would shot out a bola at any dragon he wanted, if aimed correctly.

He didn't have to pick up anything, swing anything, or risk embarrassment. He'd simply shoot down the dragon and finally earn a speck of respect. One step at a time.

"Y-young Prince Hiccup?" he heard Arte's voice.

"Yes, Arte?" Hiccup replied sluggishly.

"The King wishes to have an audience with you."

That was enough to kill his focus.

"Best clothes?" Hiccup asked.

"Yes, Prince Hiccup. When addressing the King you should always look your best."

"Because Thor forbid I actually address my father." Hiccup sighed before getting up from the Mutilator and going to change into his fancier clothes.

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It was the oddest thing that the Meeting hall looked so much smaller when it was filled with people, and Hiccup was sitting in the chair next to his father, overlooking the entire canvas. But when it was empty and Hiccup was simply staring at his father on his throneâ€|. everything seemed so much bigger. Larger than life, almost. And certainly larger than him.

But that would _have _to him one day. He gulped.

"Yes, father?" Hiccup came up right to his chair, sitting in it casually. "Arte told me you wanted to speak with me?"

"Yes, well." Stoick sighed and turned uncomfortably to face Hiccup beside him. Customarily Hiccup should've just kneeled before him, but it was a lost cause getting Hiccup to conform to rules such as those. "I know you've been frustrated being you room so much."

Hiccup flicked his gaze up. He expected the talk to be nothing more than some orderly business he had to run around and doâ€"which was better than being his room if anything elseâ€"but nothing like that. He straightened up a bit and gave his father wide eyed focus.

"It's not the first time you've done that, you know." Hiccup decided to add.

"I know, son." Stoick sat up as well. He looked tired, his eyes dropping quickly, but still so kingly at the same time. It made Hiccup swallow. "Which is why I have a suggestion for you."

The surprises didn't stop. Hiccup lifted his eyebrows. A suggestion?

"Oh?" Hiccup pressed. "Pray tell."

"How would you feel about going away for a while."

"Goingâ€|awayâ€|?" Hiccup repeated slowly, his eyes darting before he immediately jumped up. "You know I was just kidding when I said 'put me in prison to get all the benefits' last week, right?"

"Yes, yes, Son." Stoick let out a laugh. "I wasn't suggesting locking you up. Justâ€|sending you on a trip."

Hiccup calmed down a bit, letting out a sigh before sitting back down. "Well, that depends on where?"

"We've been having a good alliance with a few of the Roman colonies, so if you'd like to go and stay there you can."

Hiccup pursed his lip, keeping the air inside his mouth stubbornly. His eyes were wide as he looked around, not exactly knowing what to say. A trip abroad would be great. Wide open spaces, new people, and no dragon invasions. He would study new things and brush up on his Roman language.

While everyone back at home would continue to talk about him. And worse, then it would be about how the Useless Prince simply ran off and left his duties to his cousin because he wouldn't handle them. Hiccup let out a puff of breath and gave his father a serious look.

"Do youâ€|want me to go?" He asked slowly, suddenly sounding rather small.

Stoick's eyes widened, he wasn't expecting to hear that question any more than Hiccup was expecting to ask it. It was a rare and awkward moment when questions such as those were asked between them. Most days they barely spoke, and when they did it was stammered banter of greeting, duties, and goodbyes. The only time they ever really had a conversationâ€"if you could call it thatâ€"is when Hiccup screwed up.

"It's justâ€|" Stoick began but stopped himself. The weight of his words simply escaped in a heavy exhale, and Hiccup felt it on him. "You're not safe here." He finally settled on.

"I am safe, Dad."

"The burn on your shoulderâ€|" Stoick trailed.

"Was an accident. Snotlout has plenty more burns than me, and no one's sending him away!"

"I'm sending you to one of the Roman colonies, Hiccup." Stoick settled completely on, closing his eyes.

"Well good luck with that because I'm not going." Hiccup stood, muttering under his breath.

Stoick grabbed Hiccup's arm before he could walk off, locking him in a firm haze.

"Hiccup." Stoick said strongly. "I'm telling you that you're going to one of the Roman Colonies."

"And I'm telling you that I'm not."

"It's not up for debate."

"I thought it was 'a suggestion'."

"Well now it's an order."

A fire welled up inside Hiccup at that.

"I'm not some subject of yours that you can just order around, Dad. I'm your son, and you're just going to send me away to Thor knows where."

"You leave the day after tomorrow." Stoick told him anyways. Hiccup yanked his hand away, sucking his teeth.

"You don't even hear me." Hiccup hissed before walking off, his cape fluttering behind him.

And of course it didn't help that he found Arte already packing when he got back to his room.

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It took three more days to get to the Royal Isle of Berk and Astrid was sure she was as scurvy as anyone could get. Even the bump of the boat against the hardened land of the docks made her feel better. But once she got off, Astrid was simply a mess of rubber arms and legs.

The ground didn't rock like the boat did. And she had to get reacquainted with that physical fact.

"Alright lads." The Captain announced. "Welcome to the Royal Isle, Berk. I'm sure you've all hear of it, and know of how this is not only the resident isle of King Stoick, but also the most popular spot of dragon attacks."

He paced past the line of recruits.

"You'll all be training with Duke Spitelout, for the time being." He walked in front of Astrid, eyeing her frighteningly. "Except you, Hofferson. You'll be taking your cousin's place immediately."

"Im-immediately?" Astrid stammered.

"You heard me, Hofferson. You'll be coming with me to the palace, so I suggest you lose your sea legs and walk straight." He slapped shoulder roughly, but Astrid didn't let her topple show her pain. She stiffened her mouth and simply nodded.

"You're about to meet the King." The Captain added.

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Astrid wasn't used to the Royal Isle at all. It was so much bigger than Merkskofâ€"which was more of a speck tucked away in the mountains than an actual thriving Isle. But Berk had layers. Homes started much near the docks and spiraled upwards more so and more so

until she could see the palace. It's opening doors were guarded both by statues and men and stood what looked like fifty feet tall. It was carved into the mountain, the palace. Every inch of it somehow meshed with the rocky exterior, but still seemed so stately. And Astrid could only gaze as she walked up towards it behind the Captain.

"Look alive, Hofferson." The Captain ordered. "And close your mouth."

Astrid followed accordingly, but was sure her eyes wouldn't stop widening until she was in her quarters a far away from all the newness.

The inside of the palace was no different, of course. But coming off from the outside, Astrid expected something a little more primitive. Vikings weren't the fancy type, but the palace seemed like the picture of high end living (for a Viking, at least). Dusty drapes, carved stone floors, statues, weapons, dragon heads, and rows of candles as far as the eye could see. And stairs so many stairs.

The King's throne room was located at the second level of the palace, and once Astrid was instructed to come in through the drapes her heart dropped into her stomach.

Before her was King Stoick and Prince Hiccup.

"Ah, Captain Nesthair." Stoick greeted. "I'm glad you were able to make a safe trip back." He glanced over at Astrid, and her breath was caught dead in her stomach. She stiffened immediately, clicking her heels together. "And who's this?"

"This is a new recruit, Alastair Hofferson." Nesthair replied.

"Hofferson?" Stoick raised a brow. "In relation to Atlas Hofferson?"

"Yes. Your Kingliness." Astrid said loudly a little too loudly for her liking. But in all seriousness, she was surprised any sounds came from her mouth at all. She before the king, of course. "He's my cousin."

"Hmm, well, it's good to have another member of his family here on Berk. Your cousin was a fine warrior."

"He certainly was, King Stoick." Astrid nodded.

"And so who better than to take his place than his own cousin?" Nesthair quickly added. But Astrid's heart sank when she saw Stoick's mouth drop into a frown. He closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Nesthair!" Stoick sighed. "I know Atlas was a good warrior, but we can't just expect that much from a family member and put him in a spot he might not deserve."

Astrid swallowed. She knew she was perfectly capable of playing by the King's Warrior's rules. But how could she convince him without

being disrespectful?

"My warrior's are handpicked, the best of the best. This boy's fresh off the boat."

"But you need that spot filled, Sir." Nesthair said. "You can't be lacking in numbers for protection around here."

"I'm aware." Stoick sat up. "But an inexperienced warrior might do more harm than good." He flicked his gaze at Hiccup. "I can only be responsible for one lose canon at a time."

The young prince made a light scoff at the comment.

"King Stoick," Astrid stepped forward. Her stature was still a little wobbly, but she stood her ground. She was finally there before the King, getting her assigned rank and so close to her own brother's position. She couldn't screw this one up. "In respect for your choice, if I could prove my heritage as a Hofferson to you. I'm strong, I take orders well, and I'm passionate about protecting my people. Is there any way I can prove my worth?"

She hid her eyes behind her bangs at that point, not wanting to see the King's face as he mulled over the answer. But the voice than came to her response wasn't the one she was looking forâ€

"Perfect." Prince Hiccup said and Astrid's head snapped up. She eyed the prince for the first time since she entered the room. He was so quiet during the meeting, and so small compared to the scale of the room and his father that it was very easy to forget he was there. But he sat up just as his father did, and placed his chin on his knuckle as he gave her a good look.

"Hiccup," Stoick tried to mutter. "It's not your place to speak."

"I know, I know, but, it really is perfect." The prince smiled, seeming more and more delighted as he looked at Astrid. She couldn't help but feel a little uneasy. Had the prince figured her out already?

"Elaborate." Stoick sighed, allowing the prince to speak regardless of the rudeness.

"Don't you see, Dad? You want to send me away to a Roman colony, and this guy needs to prove his worthiness as a soldier. So why doesn't heâ€|.protect me?" Prince Hiccup said, though the words seemed to hurt him as they said them. Astrid shared the feeling. She had traveled almost two weeks on a boat, cut her hair, and risked being hanged to babysit the useless prince?

Her lips pursed at the thought. She was hoping the King would say no. It was a ludicrous idea to have a Hofferson sink down to mere babysitting duties. How hard could protecting the prince be, anyways? He stayed in the palace as far as she knew.

"Very well." Stoick said in length. But it was still a yes. Tragically, a yes.

Astrid closed her eyes and let out a sigh. She felt Nesthair nudge her shoulder a bit, eyeing her to buck up and stand tall before the

King's choice.

"Recruit Hofferson, you will be boarding here in the palace, and your test to become a warrior of mine will be to guard and protect my son at all costs_."

It was a chilling realization when Astrid locked eyes with the king for a few moments. This was serious. She really had to swear that she would willingly risk her life to protectâ€|she looked over at the prince. His posture was straight, his stature lanky, and his mind visibly reeling with the satisfaction that he had gotten his way.

"I swear I'll willing take the task of guarding the life of your son at all costs, even if it means my own life, My Good King." Astrid bowed respectfully, as did Nesthair.

"Good then, I'll task you to three months, and I'll pass my judgment afterwards." Stoick turned to Hiccup. "Show Alastair to his room, Hiccup."

"Yepâ€|" Prince Hiccup jumped down from his chair and walked towards her with a certain jaunt in his step. "Well," Hiccup said slowly.

"Let's goâ€|Alastair."

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There wasn't much talking that went on during the boat ride from Merkskof, and besides hearing Ruffnut say it, Astrid hadn't heard anyone say her boy name. Everyone on the boat simply called her "Hofferson"â€"something she was more accustomed to answer to without blinking an eye. But now, hearing the members of the Palace address her as such, and even the Prince. It was a little overwhelming.

She was lead into the Prince's room, where he directed her to a smaller door on the left side. It lead to another room, whichâ€"though not as charming as hisâ€"was nicer than anything Astrid had stayed in. The stone floors emitted a low humming noise all through the room, and even the Prince's voice echoed as he spoke.

"Alright, Alastair," his voice resonated, even stranger since he used her fake name. "You'll be staying here, all safe and cozy." He smirked at her.

"I don't think being safe and cozy is the point of me staying next door." Astrid responded dully, not looking at him. "I'm supposed to protect you, My Prince."

The Prince nearly rolled his eyes, muttering under his breath: "If I had the time to count the number of times I've hear that_." He shook his head.

Astrid followed him with her gaze, a little confused over his attitude. She was there to make sure he was safe, taking away from real warrior training to be his babysitter. Should he even be a little grateful?

She had heard much about the infamous Prince Hiccup. The hope and heir to the Viking Kingdom yet hardly the material. Everyone expected that title to easily go to his cousin, Snotlout, but she always

expectedâ€"in the off chance she'd ever meet the princeâ€"that he'd be a slip up always trying too hard. But his lax attitude was getting on her nerves.

Didn't he care what people thought about him?

"Do you have some kind of problem with me, My Prince?" Astrid asked, trying to keep her voice low and respectful. If she was going to room with him there was no sense losing her cover so quickly. "Because this was your idea to have me watch over you."

He turned and eyed her for a moment before facing his back towards her once again. But he spoke.

"I was gonna be sent away." He told her flatly before turning to her again. "I needed a reason to stay."

"So I'm just some pawn in your little plan to stay here andâ€'do what?" Astrid sucked her teeth. This was just insulting.

"Prove myself, earn some respect, you know, all the things you already have just because of your cousin."

"Hey!" Astrid snarled. "Myâ€|cousin's status may've gotten me here, but I'm just as good as any warrior here." She poked him in the chest. "And since you want a babysitter so badly, you're getting one. My Prince."

"If you wanna be on good terms with me, then you can start by using my real name." The Prince pushed her finger away, and turned off. "Drop the Prince title. We both know what you really think of me."

She didn't care if he was in a bad mood, or simply like this all the time. No one was going to sit up and question her worth as a warrior, especially when it was the notorious Useless Prince Hiccup.

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The boy went in his room with a slam of the door after their conversation was over, and Hiccup shrugged. He had been left alone in seclusion, judged, and talked about badly his entire life, so he knew exactly how people like Alastair operated. All of his father's warriors were the same. They were put up on such high pedestals they felt like they could just say or do anything they wanted. And this guyâ€|well, he was just piggybacking on the respect of his cousin.

The day Atlas as reported dead was a hard day for Hiccup. Mainly because Atlas was the one warrior he knew that wasn't a jerk. He had Hiccup barely got any time to talk for Atlas became a household name. But there was always this genuine respect in him. The kind that wasn't faked and wasn't forced. He always had this determined state of mind that anyone would be what they wanted if they just tried hard enough. It was a traditional Viking ideal, but something that Hiccup was rarely told, and rarely believed by others to do. Hiccup admired that, more so than anyone else he admired Atlas Hofferson. So, to see his cousin just jumping on the chance to be a warrior without even proving himself just because they shared the same last name.

It made him angry.

But at least he got it to work for him. Babysitter or not, he could stay on Berk, and continue to work for the respect he rightfully deserved. Something that Alastair readily got just by being related to Atlas.

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That night Hiccup had his dinner brought to him by Arte, but barely took a bite as he worked on the finishing touches of his model. In turn, Alastair was then forced to eat dinner in his room since Hiccup didn't go to Palace's mess for his meal and the two had to stay together. He chewed loudly in discomfort.

"What are you even working on?" The boy asked him.

"Something!" Hiccup responded lightly. He would've elaborated more, but he was too immersed at the moment.

"Something like?" The boy picked at it anyways. He was obviously bored, Hiccup figured.

"It's called the Mutilator." Hiccup removed his goggles, looking up at him.

"The Mu-til-ator?" He echoed slowly and lifted a brow to his antics.

"I've got a little too much time in here, as you can see. More than you know."

"What does it do?" Alastair kept asking.

"Kill dragons."

"That big thing is going to kill a dragon?" The boy cackled. "Okay then."

"Come on." Hiccup piled a few scoops of food into his mouth and hooked the Mutilator onto it wheels. "We're going."

"Um, excuse me." Alastair stood as well. "Going where?"

"Out back to test it, I'm not usually let outside, but I guess there are perks to having a body guard, huh?"

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Hiccup tweaked and re-tweaked but he just couldn't get the Mutilator to shot. And Alastair's complaints were getting a little too annoying. He ran a heavy hand over his face in a sigh. Would it be too much to ask for one thing to go his way?

"It's not working." Alastair told him flatly.

"No, really?" Hiccup rolled his eyes. "I couldn't tell."

"Don't you think we should be calling it a night?" He asked instead. "I'm not even sure you're supposed to be out here."

"It's fine." Hiccup waved him off. "Besides, you've got it covered if anything happens, right?"

Alastair simply slumped against the rock he was sitting on, twirling his axe before him before a crackle hit in the air. It sounded likeâ€¡

"Dragons!" A distant voice sounded off. "Dragon Raid!"

Hiccup could see Alastair's stance immediately change. He sat up and gripped his axe, moving towards Hiccup quickly.

"We're going inside now." He ordered. But Hiccup ignored him. It was perfect, a raid was happening and he was able to be outside. Now all he had to do was get the Mutilator to workâ€¡

"If I could just get this thing to work," Hiccup voiced, practically rocking the contraption back and forth and looking through the aim.

"Are you crazy?" He could hear Alastair's voice behind him. "There's no way I'm letting something happen to you on my first day on duty andâ€€"

"Shhh," Hiccup cut the boy off. There was a hissing among the distant crackles in the air. He had only heard that noise a few times, for he was rarely outside during a dragon raid. But any Viking knew that noise for miles.

"Night Fury!" A voice called out again.

"Princeâ€€!" Alastair cried, tugging him away, but Hiccup snatched his arm suddenly, stilling him.

"Look," He whispered, never taking his eyes away from the aim, but pointed towards the sky. The starry night seemed to be flickering erratically. As if someone was moving a black blanket across the sky. But it wasn't a blanket, Hiccup knew that for sure.

The hissing grew louder and louder until he just took a chance. He closed his eyes in hope, pulling the lever back as far as he could before releasing it quickly.

Both he and Alastair watched in amazement as the bola flung through the sky and made contact with the flying blackness. Its shriek could be heard even where they stood and they watched as it fell over the palace into the far away forest of Raven Point.

Hiccup swallowed, but he only found that his mouth had run dry. Heâ€¡he did it.

"I did it." His mouth hung open. "Iâ€¡I caught a dragon."

"That thing works." Was all Alastair could say with wide eyes, and Hiccup felt his first wave of smugness come over him. He had just shot down a dragon right in front of a warrior, after all. In a contraption he didn't even believe worked.

"Come on," Hiccup immediately started running. "Let's go get

it."

"Prince Hiccup wait!" Alastair called after him a few moments later in a panic. In the high of success Hiccup easily forgot that he was in the middle of a raid, but he was quickly reminded when a Monstrous Nightmare landed right in front of him. It pinned him down with its claws, growling angrily.

:: _Humanâ€|death _::

It was the power again, Hiccup gulped. He had given it much thought the day he heard the odd thoughts in his mind from the gronckle, but afterwards, he forced himself to bury the notion rather than explore it further. He had no proof what he heard was actually the thought of that dragon, but, if anything, he couldn't let that get in the way of what he had to do as a prince. He was meant to _kill_ dragons, and hearing their thoughts didn't help that fact.

But then there he was, two seconds away from death yet again and all he could do was pant and try to figure out what exactly he was hearing. His mind was becoming too open, and something was reaching towards his heart.

"Don't kill meâ€|" Hiccup whispered under his breath, but his mind did most of the talking, speaking out of panic. But when the dragon's jaw stoppedâ€"wide openâ€"right before him, Hiccup gasped. The dragon looked, for lack of a better word, surprised and a bit confused.

The feeling was mutual for Hiccup. Did that dragon understand him?

::_Humanâ€|understands me? :: _Hiccup heard the dragon's thoughts once more, it was chopping and a little hard to decipher, but he got the gist. The dragon didn't unpin him, but he didn't eat him either. Its eyes widened in shock and leaned down to growl a little more towards Hiccup's face.

"Prince Hiccup!" He heard Alastair's voice come in suddenly, and the ding of the metal of his axe against skin crushed in his ears. He knocked the dragon off of him, and the Nightmare went tumbling into the nearby tree.

:: _Pain! ::_ The dragon exclaimed as it knocked the tree over. Alastair had wounded its leg. Hiccup winced at the whimpers it head from the Monstrous Nightmare, and a fist clenched his heart again just like it did with the gronckle.

Before any more words could be ushered a band of guards came up from the backside of the palace and immediately apprehended the beast. Hiccup didn't hear any snatches of thoughts that time, but he could read the dragon's eyes well enough.

It was a prisoner, and it was sad.

"Are you two alright out here?" A guard asked and Alastair answered for him.

"Prince Hiccup was attacked by that Nightmare, but I was able to get it off him." He reported, and even as the boy spoke, he helped Hiccup up. Hiccup would've, in any other circumstance, defended himself to

not make it look like he, once again, had to be rescued, but his mind was still reeling and the fist still clenched over his heart as the dragon's whimpers could still be heard.

It was enough to make him not want to bury the notion again. The world around him seemed to only be in his secondary senses, while his real sense was inside his own mind for some reason. His heart still clenched, and it was making his mind feel hollow and violated. Something else was going on inside him, and it worried him.

0o0

Before he knew it, he was back in his room, Arte hovering over him in a panic as he fluttered his eyes open.

"Oh, thank goodness you're alright, Prince Hiccup." Arte smiled cheerfully and Hiccup just groaned, trying to sit up. "We were all so worried when you passed out."

"What?" He held his head. The room was spinning, and his heart still lurched, but at least his awareness seemed to be back where it supposed to be. Only downside was it felt he was shoved back into it rather than gradual coming back.

"After Alastair saved you, you passed out, you've been out since last night." Arte looked behind for a moment. "It's nearly sunrise now."

"What!" Hiccup sat up completely, ignoring his splitting headache as he growled.

Great. He had shot down a dragon and just had to be attacked right after. What if the dragon wasn't in Raven Point anymore? Especially after a whole night of him just lying around.

And as if it couldn't get any worseâ€!

Alastair entered, his newly minted warrior outfit fitting for her bodyguard dutyâ€"chain mail at the waist, green tunic, cape, and allâ€"but her cape had a certain clank to it, and Hiccup new that clank anywhere. It was the kind he heard every time Snotlout came up to himâ€or any warrior for that matter.

Upon Alastair's cape was a metal. The Metal of Bravery. He had probably earned it from 'saving the helpless prince' from the Monstrous Nightmare during the latest dragon raid. A story that was sure to make it on the monthly news presentations round. That was enough to make Hiccup lie back down against the pillows in anguish. He let out another groan and covered his face with his hand, only the peeks between his fingers allowing him to see Alastair stand next to his bed and look over him with an examining face of annoyance and amusement.

"Babysitting you is going to be a handful," Alastair said in what seemed like a jest, but Hiccup could see that the boy was serious. "Isn't it?"

**Yes, I'm done! These chapters are turning out a lot longer than I initially anticipated. But, hey, who doesn't like nice 6,000 word

chapters? **

**Anyways, just to dodge some bullets, lets discuss some stuff:
**

**The Palace, it's pretty much placed where the Great Hall is if you didn't pick that up. **

**Stoick, Yes, he's a busy King whose job is a lot more complicated than just keeping the order on Berk like he did in the movie. He really does have to govern all the other islands as well, and it gets exhausting. He lost his wife and has a less than ideal child that he simply wants to keep safe. These this impression that Hiccup used to have a lot more freedom, but he'd always get hurt and Stoick made himself choose between having a son who was ideal and keeping him alive. He obvious chose the later on that one. **

Now, Hiccup, on the other hand. Has a little more bitterness in him than he did in the movie. He's talked about by everyone, butâ€"unlike in the movieâ€"everyone **_*has*_ to be nice and respectful to him, because he's the prince. Hiccup knows they're all fake, and longs for someone who really looks him in the eye and tells him straight, and also someone who listens to him. That's why he can't stand Arte, because she's his maid who acts respectful towards him and then will turn around and talk horribly about him when she does her womanly gossip. So, did he judge Astrid a little when he first met her? Yeah, but it's all he's used to. Plus, yes, Hiccup is used to being waited on. He's used to being able to boss people around, and they simply listen to him because they have to. It's one of those flaws of his in this story and a way for him to feel like he's being heard to a certain degree. This will mostly be shown with Arte and Astrid. **

**And, for those of you who went "Where the heck is Ruffnut!" Sorry but she's going a separate way in the story, but we'll see her again. You'll just have to wait, but, man, will she have an interesting story to tell when we do meet her. **

And moving on to the way the story's actually written. It'll be split between 3**rd**** person limited to Hiccup and to Astrid. When it's in Astrid's 3****rd**** person, she will be seen as the girl she is and her real name will be used. But, when it's Hiccup's 3****rd**** personâ€"since he doesn't know Astrid's a girlâ€"he will be addressing her as a boy with male pronouns and only using "Alastair". So don't get too confused on that one. "She is Astrid" and "He is Alastair" are talking about the same person. **

Umm, I think that's it (I talk too muchâ€|)

Review Repsonses:

JustBlossom: Wow, thank you. That's a real compliment, I hope this chapter was just as good.

**Crazy nightfury lady: Thanks! And a lot of people loved Astrid's part of the story. I favor it as well, mostly because I got to make it up more so than I did with Hiccup's. **

**Animelvr2x2X2x2: Um, this story hasn't been around for two yearsâ€|soâ€|.yeah. But I'm glad you like it, here's chapter

two!**

Adrine R. 227: Well, I've never played Skyrim, I don't even know what it's about, I just know it's a game. But I'll take that as a compliment. My actual inspirations/references for this story is the anime Busou Renkin and the book series Leviathan (I think that's all of them). I don't know if you've read/watched those though. And sorry this chapter came late, but as I mentioned in the author's note, it turned out longer than I expected.

**Fjord Mustang: Cool, glad you picked up the "once upon a time" vibe. I always felt HTTYD had the potential to be in a fairy tale setting, but I didn't want it be too Disney. And I'm glad you like that Hiccup can hear Dragon's thoughts. I wanted to add that addition the book had but the movie didn't, but I didn't want him to just be able to speak to them. A deeper communication through mind reading seems a lot cooler. And as for Astrid's story, I loved making up a new motivation for her as a fighter, and her brother's role is fun to slip into the overall plot as well. **

**Thanks for the reviews guys/girls! I know I'm new to the HTTYD fanfiction world, but hey, we all gotta start somewhere. Hopefully you'll all enjoy the story either way. **

3. Understood and Encountered

**Man, this chapter still took pretty long, but it's here! Hang in there, guys, because here comes the introduction to Toothless!
**

**Oh, and I don't think I did a disclaimer yet, but you all know I own nothing. **

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Three: Understood and Encountered

Astrid couldn't stop staring at her Medal of Bravery. Earning one on her first day on Berk wasn't too shabby, if she was one to talk. It shined on her cape as she sat in her room, and every time she touched it the clank of the metal resonated throughout her room. It empowered her in a way, and gave her the willpower to open the door and face the next day with that Prince.

She scowled at him, finding it just plain wrong to be asleep when the sun was so high. He had passed out after Arte got him breakfast, even though he fought a battle hard and long to stay awake, claiming he had somewhere to be.

Astrid knew, without a doubt, that he wanted to go out and catch that dragon he shot down the previous night. She wasn't kidding when she had said babysitting him was going to be a handful. He was wily one if she had ever seen one, and that wasn't making her job any easier. So perhaps being a bodyguard to the prince was a good test of her worth? Anyone who could stand him for three months ought to earn a whole cape full of medals.

She walked over to Arte, who was tidying up Hiccup's room a bit, and cleared her throat. Astrid was perfectly inclined to speaking to a

woman as she would any other girl, but she had to remind herself that, to everyone, she was Alastair Hofferson, a warrior, and certainly not a girl who partook in chatty talk.

"Does he always sleep this late?" Astrid felt it was right to ask. She had to know the habits of whom she was guarding, after all.

"Yes," Arte rolled her eyes and spoke quietly while she folded some clothes. "Being a nuisance takes a lot out of him."

Astrid didn't respond. She wasn't one to speak badly about the Prince out loudâ€"no matter what was going on in her headâ€"but this woman was a maid! And she always seemed so cheery about her work nonetheless.

"You'll have your hands tied with this one, Alastair." Arte continued, not even waiting for her to respond. "He's always running around thinking he can fight and 'prove himself'. If only he knew his place." She looked over at the sleeping prince. "Sleeping right there in his bed and not thinking he'll rule us all."

"But, the Prince is supposed to take the throne after King Stoick." Astrid gulped, keeping her voice low. Arte was probably correct, but there was something painfully disrespectful in speaking about the Prince that way in his own room. Even if it was in muttered tones.

"Can you imagine what would become of the Viking Kingdom if we all had to seek orders from 'King Hiccup'?" She laughed quietly. "I'd pack up and move further south the quickest of anyone."

"That's nice." Astrid nodded flatly and turned to leave. She was definitely finished with that conversation. Useless or not, it was not her place to speak of the Prince in such manners, and especially not the place of that maid either.

Luckily Arte went to go get some linings for the bed shortly after, but unluckily, and just like that, Hiccup began to stir. Astrid felt her heart drop and she gulped. Had he heard what they were talking about?

"Arte?" Hiccup mumbled.

"No, My Prince, it's me, Alastair." She answered, getting slightly more used to even calling herself by her boy's name. She went over to his bedside and stood perfectly still, watching him as he woke.

"Do you watch me sleep too?" He smirked a bit, his voice groggy. But her serious face was enough to make him wipe the smirk off of his face. His lips dropped and he immediately looked confused. "What? Did I do something wrong in my sleep?"

"No, just thinking." Astrid told him. She was trying to figure him out for the most part. In the many years on Merkskof she had heard rumors of the Useless Prince Hiccup who would never inherit his father's title. And then when she finally made it here, instead of being the clumsy mess she expected he was a prideful outcast. Her conversation with Arte shed light on just what everyone on Berk thought of him, and Astrid had no doubts that Hiccup knew what they

thought of him as well. And yet, he still wanted to stay on Berk, still wanted to catch and kill a dragon, and was so damn smug about it.

She frowned and simply stared without thinking of how weird it seemed to Hiccup.

"Umm," He darted his eyes around, sitting up. "Okay. Well, let's get ready." He pulled the covers off of him and revealed his sleeping pantsâ€"or really short pants, for that matter.

Astrid's train of thought was snapped and her whole body seemed to rise with a scream that she didn't let escape. It wasn't particularly uncommon to see a man in such an attireâ€"or lack thereofâ€"in Merkskof, but Hiccup was a prince after all, and it was wrong on all four planes for her to see him that way.

But she wasn't a women to him, she remembered. She was supposed to be a guy after all.

"Umm," it was Astrid's turn to mumble. "W-where are we going?"

He grabbed her cape and pulled her down to him. "The dragon I shot down yesterday." He said quietly. "You knowâ€!"

"Oh, no!" Astrid stood back up. "You're not feeling well and I'm not saving your butt again just because you wanna run off and do something stupid."

"So sorry, but you're my body guard. Your job isn't to tell me what I can or can't too. It's to guard me no matter what I'm doing." Hiccup got up from the bed and walked over to his clothes. But looked over his shoulder with a satisfied twinkle in his eyes. "Unlessâ€|you want me to tell my dad to find someone elseâ€|?"

"You wouldn't dare." Astrid narrowed her eyes at him, but the young Prince nearly grinned at her, batting his eyes playfully. "Fine." She agreed to. "But what are we going to tell your father?"

"He's busy today, we won't have to tell him anything as long as we're quiet." Hiccup slipped on his undershirt. "But there's alwaysâ€!"

On cue, Arte entered with fresh linings, not even phased by the Prince's current state of dress and he didn't seem too red about it either.

"Oh, good to see you awake, Prince Hiccup." Arte smiled. There was that cheery exterior Astrid remembered. But it all seemed so deceitful at that point. "I brought some fresh linings for your bed."

"That's good, Arte, put them on for me. Alastair and I are going for a walk."

"It's a little muggy outside, you might want to stay in, My Prince." Arte told him.

"People don't die from mugginess, Arte." Hiccup rolled his eyes and tied his waist sash around his outer tunic. "And last time I checked I didn't need your permission to go somewhere."

"I'm so sorry, Prince Hiccup." Arte bowed her head. "Have a pleasant time on your walk."

"Oh, don't worry, I will." Hiccup settled his clothes in place and Astrid didn't miss him putting his dagger in his waist sash for a moment. He gave Arte a thorough glare, and Astrid saw her winced at the look. "Come on, Alastair." He called to her and as much as Astrid hated it, she quickly followed after his beckoning.

Yep, definitely a handful.

0o0

"Is there always that much..umâ€¦?" Astrid began as she and Hiccup walked down the halls to the main entrance.

"Tension?" Hiccup finished for her. "Yeah, always."

"It must be hard, having a maid like that." Astrid let her voice slip a little, but she quickly corrected herself. Hiccup glanced up at her for a moment before letting his eyes fall and it was the first genuine emotion she actually saw on his face other than his normal smug smirk since she had met him.

"You noticed it?" He asked her quietly, stopping his stride altogether.

"How fake she is?" Astrid shrugged. "Hasn't everyone?"

"People don't really notice it since they're the same way themselves." He told her flatly, but there was a crack of emotion and he still didn't move even though Astrid was paces in front of him. She finally stopped as well, standing a good distance away but still able to hear him perfectly. The dull lighting of the candle rows flickered more noticeably now that she was standing still, and that along with the company of a seemingly emotional prince was enough to make her more than uncomfortable.

Comforting wasn't exactly Astrid's forte, but luckily she didn't have to.

A light sniffle, a shake of fabric, and a few footsteps was all she heard before Hiccup was walking passed her, turning to see his medal-less cape flying freely through the burnt air.

"Come on, we have a dragon to catch."

Astrid could only smile a bit as she followed him.

A handful, and perhaps a bit of a mystery too.

0o0

Raven Point Forest was located right behind the palace, so it was quite a hike for someone who didn't know the region. Hiccup could see Alastair following behind him with a focused look in his eyes, he had only been on Berk two days, of course, but, sadly, Hiccup wasn't too accustomed with the woods either. Traveling through the woods wasn't the kind of activity a Prince did, especially a prince who had been

on lock down up until that point.

So je took a small sketch book with him and drew the surroundings as they walked, making small notches in the trees with his dagger along the way.

"Do you even know where we're going?" Alastair asked, swatting some bugs away while Hiccup ripped out his dagger and scratched another tree, not even looking while he did so.

"Not entirely, but I saw the general area where the dragon fell. It was somewhere around here." Hiccup told him, but the boy didn't look too convinced. He merely glowered at him and swatted away more bugs. "Not a nature lover?" Hiccup asked. He knew Alastair wasn't from Berk, but he didn't know his own body guard would be so dainty out in the wild.

"I'm just not used to all these bugs." He swatted away more and more. Hiccup could only laugh and grabbed his wrist, stopping it mid-swat. "Back in Merkskof we didn't really have forests, it more of a rocky beach."

"Well, all I can say is stop swatting them and they'll leave you alone, for the most part." Hiccup told him. "You're only agitating them by doing that."

"Um, thanks." Alastair mumbled and Hiccup smirked.

"Going after a downed dragon, saving my bodyguard from bugs, and even being thanked by him. This is an exciting day." He said to himself, but loudly enough so Alastair could hear. And the look on the warrior's face was more than enough of a reward.

"What do you have against new comers, Prince Hiccup?" Alastair suddenly asked, as he made it to the top of the boulder they were climbing up. Hiccup sat down on the apex of it, not too opposed to having a small chat with this guy before they made their way deeper into the forest. On Hiccup's merits, after all, the boy had earned a good explanation on one or two matters.

And for once someone was actually asking him a genuine question.

Alastair sat down beside him, giving him a focused look. He was actually listening to him too.

"It's not newcomers," Hiccup sighed. "It's everyone."

"Well that's a bit general." Alastair let out a small chuckle, but Hiccup looked up at him. He wasn't used to being able to talk to someone at all, but whatever look he gave Alastair stopped him from laughing almost immediately. And the boy's focused look was back. "But, you're serious?" Alastair asked.

Hiccup nodded. "I know exactly how people like you are."

"People like me? You barely know me."

"All you warriors are the same." Hiccup shook his head. Here he went again. "You're prodigies, admired, extolled by everyone because

you're all just so brave."

"So what's wrong with that?" Alastair snapped. Typical, Hiccup thought. "You can't be mad because we're talented."

"It's not your talent." Hiccup ripped out his dagger again and slashed the tree next to them in routine. "It's your attitude." He continued, looking down at his hands. They crunched the fabric of his pants lightly, pinching the skin that seemed to be quickly covering with sweat. He could feel his emotions coming out in violent waves. Every time he had given the subject any thought, it had always stayed between his own two ears. But now, he was speaking out to someone.

And they were listening.

"All of sudden everyone who can swing and axe is on a higher level of respect than me. And I'm the prince!" Hiccup continued. "You all just think you're better than me."

There. He said it. Hiccup closed his eyes.

He was expecting Alastair to laugh. To leave, or perhaps even to assume the basic role and just comfort him and tell him lies about how people did respect him. But insteadâ€

"Well, with that sorry attitude, no wonder you're not getting any respect."

Hiccup blinked, but wasted no time giving him a snarled look. Did he really just say that?

It seemed that his words caught up with him, for Alastair immediately looked shocked at his own self.

"Er, I mean." He stuttered. "I'm sorry, My Prince."

That was more like what he was used to. Hiccup sucked his teeth and stood, sliding down the other side of the boulder, Alastair closely behind him.

"I said I was sorry," Alastair called out after him.

"Yeah, I heard you."

Suddenly, Alastair was in front of him, arms spread out wide. Hiccup could've just walked to the right or the left, but, a strange sense of amusement towards Alastair's answer intrigued him. He stood in his palace, playing into the illusion of being trapped.

"Look, I shouldn't have said that. It was disrespectful." Alastair told him instead and it was odd enough for Hiccup that he actually felt a fresh twinge of disappointment well up within him. One that apparently Alastair could see. "What?"

"It was disrespectful, huh?" Hiccup baited. "_Do_ you have any respect for me, Alastair?"

Alastair opened and closed his mouth many times, a gesture Hiccup would've found amusing if he actually wasn't eagerly waiting for a

response. It was odd. He didn't even have the tolerance of expecting something in his father anymore.

"You're my prince," Alastair gave him a dry answer. "Of course I respect you."

"Why?"

"I just said why."

"No," Hiccup laughed bitterly. "You said what you thought you had to say. But if you had to tell me the truth right now, not as a prince but as a person, what would you say?"

No answer.

"Alastair."

"Iâ€œ!" Alastair started. Hiccup could see him fighting his hardened morals greatly. Respect the Prince when in his presence was what everyone was told to do. But if they were going to be forced together for three months, Hiccup wouldn't allow for another fake person stepping all over him.

"I barely know you," Alastair finally answered. His voice was strained. "Soâ€œno, I guess."

The boy's face scrunched. A lifetime of restraint seemed to snap within him, but for Hiccup it was the exact opposite. An honest opinion was greatly appreciated, and when he smiled at Alastair, the warrior's face was priceless.

"Well then. I guess I have something to gain from this, now don't I?" Hiccup told him, smiling as he walked past the boy, but Alastair grabbed his arm, stopping him.

"So that's it?" Alastair asked in a quickened confusion, as if the whole thing left him out of breath.

"Yeah," Hiccup shrugged, but his voice perked a bit. He actually felt a little relieved.

"You just want me to be rude and disrespectful and you'll be fine?" Alastair laughed slightly to himself.

"I want you to treat me like I'm a person, not a God. You don't have to kiss the ground I walk on. And if I have your respect I want to know that I've earned it, not that I get it from some title."

He could see the candle igniting above Alastair's head. It wasn't completely lit, but he could tell that he was starting to get it.

And that would have to be good enough for the moment.

0o0

Arte's prediction of a muggy afternoon were starting to come to the forefront. The deeper Hiccup and Alastair made it into the forest, the more rows of fog entered their vision. It caked the moss and the

grass, making everything damp and clumpy. Hiccup could feel the humidity forming a wet sheen over his brow, and he looked over to see Alastair was not too different.

The notches he made in the barks of the trees were becoming multiple, and his map looked like nothing but smudged charcoal scribbles. They were lost, no doubt.

Sill, Hiccup looked at his sketch book and marked off another x on the empty clearing they had just made it to.

"It's got to be close to sunset by now." Alastair leaned against the damp bark of the tree, catching his breath.

"Stop worrying, sunset's still an hour away." Hiccup shushed him. Alastair seemed to already be developing the habit of wanting to cut out early, something he didn't exactly expect from a warrior. But as he looked at the way Alastair carried himself he could immediately tell that while there was talent and fighting spirit within the boy, he had never been in a correct situation to let it out.

Catching the dragon would be a test of skill for both of them, then.

And with that thought Hiccup smiled. He couldn't shake the thudding of his heartbeat every time they got close to a clearing, only to see that there was no dragon there. It must've landed in a clearing, anything else and Hiccup would've heard its impact the previous night, even with all the commotion of a dragon raid.

But there was a silence between him and Alastair as they walked through the damp forest. Boots squishing into grass still, but the humidity began to fade as the hour became later, and sunset was approaching.

They had been searching the forest all afternoon, and still no dragon.

Hiccup collapsed underneath the shade of a tree, gasping.

"Troubles, Prince Hiccup?" Alastair knelt down beside him, giving him a grin. Even with the thin layer of foggy perspiration on his skin, Alastair looked fresher than Hiccup, and he figured that perhaps Alastair's need to 'cut our early' wasn't a need at all. He just wanted to cut out of finding some dragon that probably broke free from the Mutilator's bola and flew off.

"Save your breath, I don't need the sarcasm." Hiccup swatted the air and closed his eyes.

"Look who's talking." Alastair let out a laugh. "And, for the record, it looks like you're the one who needs the breath, not me."

"Haha," Hiccup pretended to laugh, and scrunched his nose. There were too many particles of dirt and broken leaves falling onto his face, and it was beginning to seep into his closed eyes. "Quit it, Alastair."

"That's not me." Hiccup opened his eyes when Alastair responded nervously and followed the boy's vision up to the top of the tree.

Something was dangling above them, something big and black and tangled up in a bola. And in the array of green tree tops mixing with the last peaks of sun glaring through them, the figure seemed like an oddly placed spot in the scheme of things. Especially when a wing poked out from it.

"I think we found your dragon." Alastair said breathlessly.

Hiccup looked up just as breathlessly, the dragon was definitely stuck, but it was moving in stalled jerks, like it was halfway between consciousness and unconsciousness. But it wasn't roaring, growling, and its eyes seemed closed.

Hiccup lifted a brow as he stared, but then had a notion. The ability he hadâ€|or thought he had.

It was highly illogical, of course, and Hiccup had made a silent decision to just bury the thought of having any contact with the creatures beyond killing after the incident with the gronkle. But it kept coming back into his mind anyways. When the nightmare attacked him the previous day, and even then, he heard faint whispers of thoughts that weren't his.

Not fighting it, Hiccup closed his eyes for a split moment, concentrating on the dragon hanging above him; little leaf particles still hitting his eye lids.

_:: Stay awakeâ€|don't driftâ€|:: _Hiccup finally heard the faint whispers amplify into thoughts that certainly weren't his own. And it made no sense for them to be Alastair's. But if what he heard was the case, then the dragon was half dead. And would be easier to kill.

He opened his eyes and walked closer under the shade of the rustling tree. The crinkles of the leaves beneath his boots were stumped by something smooth underneath them suddenly. Smooth andâ€|wet.

He looked down and was completely mortified by what he saw.

"Gah!" Hiccup jerked back.

"What's wrong Prince Hiccup?" Alastair immediately stepped forward.

"Whatâ€|" Hiccup began, gulping. "What is this?" He pointed down to what he had stepped on and Alastair shared his distaste.

"It'sâ€|a tail fin."

And there it was, a midnight black tail fin coated in blood and dirt on the ground, and when Hiccup looked directly up, he saw the dragon's tail dangling lifelessly, half of its tailfin missing and blood dripping down near his feet.

It made him want to throw up.

"That dragon can't be alive with an amputation like that. And if it is, it would be alive for long." Alastair said and squinted as he looked upwards. "Downed dragons never stay alive for long." He added.

Hiccup only gulped again. The ends of his bola rope were near the tailfin, caked in blood.

Hadâ€|had he done this?

"Soâ€|what do you wanna do My Prince?" Alastair asked quietly as he stepped closer.

"That dragon's good as dead, right?" Hiccup asked as well.

"Most likely."

"Thenâ€|then I should just do it."

"If you wish." Alastair looked up. "It's pretty far up the tree though." He kicked off his boots and took off his cape, cracking his knuckles.

"What are you doing?" Hiccup raised a brow.

"Getting the dragon for you." Alastair shrugged.

"Yeah, but this is my thingâ€|I can't having you kill it."

"I'm not going to kill it, I'm just going to get it down for you."

"And what makes you think I can't get it down myself?"

"When was the last time you climbed a tree?" Alastair gave a smirk, himself.

Hiccup bit his lip. He was barely let out of the house, let alone in the woods. So climbing a tree was a bit foreign to him, despite him being surrounded by them his entire life. Still, having Alastair along didn't mean that he had to everything for him. And, if he recalled their conversation earlier that afternoon, Alastair didn't grow up around trees either.

He opened his mouth to reply, but it was too late. Alastair wasn't wasting too much time waiting for him to finish thinking, for the boy was already halfway up the tall tree. Hiccup watched in amazement at the speed in which he climbed even though he had never been properly around trees, and even how fearlessly he approached the half-dead dragon.

Although Hiccup expected Alastair to take the axe strapped to his back and cut the dragon free, the warrior pulled a small dagger of his own from his boot, flipping it up and beginning to slice through the first of the ropes rather quickly, and still so quietly. Hiccup pulled out his own dagger, staring at it helplessly.

Alastair must've had a whole collection of odd weapons hidden within his clothes, and all Hiccup could even possibly hope to wield was his mother's dagger. Though finely crafted, it seemed like a terrifying relic at the moment.

But, in no time at all, Hiccup was snapped out of his thoughts by the dragon when it fell in a loud thud and leaves rustling not too far from him, still looking dead even after the impact.

Hiccup swallowed. There he was, face to face with a night fury andâ€|

All he had was a dagger.

The sudden thought echoed creepily through his mind and made his palms sweat and his hands shake. The combination of both caused the dagger to slip out of his grasp and fall with a gentle clank right near the dragon. Hiccup let out an odd mix of a swallow and a breath before he bent down to pick it up. And when the dagger was safely back in his palm and he stood, he was met with a pair of emerald eyes piercing through him.

The dragon was awakeâ€| .

0o0

Whether or not Hiccup believed he was hearing dragon's thoughts or not, there was nothing more terrifying than hearing the phrase :_:_humanâ€|did this to me::: _over and over and _angrily_ in his mind.

The dragon had him pinned in two seconds flat, and Hiccup almost lost his grip on his mother's dagger again.

_:::This human. Did this to me!::: _The dragon's thoughts were simply entering his mind without Hiccup even having to concentrate. He could feel its anger pouring out onto him in hot and almost electric currents.

He gasped.

"Get away from him!" Hiccup heard Alastair calling out moments later. Leaping down from the tree and onto the dragon's back, his axe finally in hand and ready to cut. But the Night fury was agile and took its grip off Hiccup to slash at Alastair.

Hiccup never thoughtâ€"even in the short time of knowing Alastairâ€"that he'd hear the boy scream in pain. But he was surprised to hear so when he saw the dragon's claws dig into Alastair's shoulder and the boy fell over in a whoosh of the fabrics and chain mail. There was no denying the blood that came from the three clawed cuts in Alastair's shoulder, or that the warrior was out cold. Or that Hiccup was left alone against the unholy offspring of lightning and death itself.

"Alastair!" Hiccup called out, running up to him, but the dragon turned its attention back to him. For something that seemed half dead a few minutes ago, it sure was lively and even more empowered now that it had taken out one of them.

Hiccup placed the dagger firmly in his grip, keeping it at his side as he rounded circles with the dragon until Hiccup took a stance in front of Alastair, feeling odd to have his body guard down for the count and himself wielding a dagger in protection.

And then another notion passed over him. He had been able to stop the Nightmare from killing him by trying to talk to it. Maybe the night fury would listen too? Even though it had a deathly look in its eyes,

simply playing with him and keeping the standoff would only last him so long.

"Well!?" Hiccup called out to the dragon. All this waiting was making him manic. "What's it gonna be!?"

The dragon growled, getting up on its toes and looking ready to pounce. Hiccup shot his gaze around frantically, looking for any way he and Alastair could survive. And he noticed the ropes that were cut from the bola. Dangling from the tree and looking suspiciously useful. He grinned and when the dragon finally made its leap Hiccup got it with his daggerâ€"right in the leg. A thump of pressure hit his dagger, a sensation that rocked his skeleton and left him feelingâ€|weaker as opposed to empowered.

He knew that wouldn't stop it though, especially when he didn't even hear the dragon's gasps of pain. It only growled further at him, all though that jab left Hiccup feeling odd, it enabled him to be right where he needed to be. Back under the tree.

He waved his dagger again. "C-come and get it." He attempted a tease, not even knowing where the spurt of braveness was coming from. Maybe it was his intense need to prove himself finally seeming closer than ever and overriding every doubting through he could even conjure? Or perhaps the 'invincible Alastair' lying useless and needing his protection?

But it was pure luck that his plan actually worked. That when the dragon came lunging towards him again it tumbled right into his rope trap. Being hooked in the tangle of ropes yet again, but this time, it was choking the dragon.

Hiccup's lips tugged in a smile, but were stopped halfway when he had realized the extent of what he'd done.

Heâ€|had hung a dragon.

It dangled, hind legs wiggling frighteningly and it arms clawed at the rope around its neck, letting out odd combinations of gasps, roars, and whines.

_::: Don't drift..don'tâ€|driftâ€|::: _Hiccup finally heard in the rant of his heavy breathing. The dragon's frantic movements were beginning to slow and it's gasps were turning into shortened gulps, becoming more and more far between.

:::Don't driftâ€|::: He heard again, and his finger tingled around his dagger, looking down at the blade he saw a small smear of blood on it, from when he had jabbed the night fury. And it was probably the first speck of blood that had met that dagger since his mother used it.

Was this really okay? He thought as he turned to walk towards Alastair. It was something he had always wanted, the moment he expected to feel triumphant and worthy, but instead his stomach flipped, his mind reeled, and his feet wobbled under an invisible pressure

What it was, it stopped him mid-turn. Whether it was the sudden gasp he heard from the dragon, the hallow whistle of the wind over his

sweaty brow that echoed the death in the air, or both. He took a good look at his capture.

Missing a tail fin, stabbed in the leg, and hanging from a tree, that dragon was every bit as good as dead. So why pity it? It was fate after all, and Hiccup was always taught to take every opportunity with brute force.

But to kill. To walk away and leave a living thing to die from his own force of will. Hiccup still looked at the dragon.

::: Drifting. Can't hold on...:::

And to hear it dying before him.

Hiccup made the only choice he could've.

He had wanted to slay a dragon, earn respect, his title, everythingâ€"all in that one day. But instead he let it all go just because he couldn't kill it. He couldn't bring himself to take the life of that night fury.

He cut the rope, and the dragon dropped in another loud thud against the dead leaves. It took a while for it to look up at him, eyes weak and stature wobbling. But, it was still alive.

Hiccup offered it a weak smile, not feeling the slightest alarm even though the dragon was free again.

_:::Did this to me..and saved me?::: _The dragon questioned.

:::Get out of here before I change my mind.::: Hiccup eyed the dragon, thinking only to himself, but somehow the dragon had heard him when it responded.

_:::I go. But of will, my own.::: _Hiccup could feel the smirk within the creature as it spread it's wing slowly and carefully. Its wingspan seemed to make the forest around him smaller and for every means did Hiccup know the dragon meant to fly. But it wouldn't get off the ground.

Not with a missing tail fin, an injured leg, and a tightened windpipe.

Hiccup simply went over to Alastair, contemplating the best way to pick him up, and unknowingly wiped the blood off his mother's dagger on the side of his pant leg and placed it back into his waist sash.

He felt the dragon's eyes tightened, glaring at him as he walked away with Alastair, but the one thing he felt more than anything was its astonishment.

:::This humanâ€|using a weapon of confusing me.:::

0o0

Astrid woke up to see an orange sky and the prince in her upper vision.

It was sunset, and they were still in the forest. But all that crossed her mind in an immediate pain was where the night fury was.

"Prince Hiccup!?" She shot up quickly, only to regret it seconds later when she realized the pain she felt was in her shoulder. It spiked her senses. "Ah!"

"You might not want to move it too much." Hiccup told her, sitting on a rock beside her, not even bothering to meet her gaze. Instead, he was fixated on the forest in front of them, looking too lost in thought for it to be normal.

Astrid stood, not wanting a scratched shoulder to put her out of line. She had left her Prince unprotected against a night fury, after all, but judging on the setting she was currently in, there was no dragon in sight, and the Prince seemed uninjured despite the bloodstain she saw on his pant leg.

"What happened, Prince Hiccup?" She asked him slowly, looking around. "Did youâ€|did you kill the dragon?"

"I couldn't do it." Hiccup said simply, still not meeting her eyes.

"What do you mean you _couldn't do it_!?"

"I mean what I said, Alastair!" He yelled, turning half way to her, but stopping suddenly. His voice rose and fell all in one breath before he calmed himself down. Heâ€|wasn't acting like himself, not because he was uneasy, but it was because all Astrid heard this boy talk about since she met him was killing a dragon, getting respect, earning his place. And all of a sudden he 'couldn't do it'.

"Why on earth would you screw that up?" She tried him. She was still getting used to being openly rash with him, but, admittedly, it was easier to do then always having to mind her tongue.

"Because that's who I am, Alastair, a screw up." Hiccup sighed, oddly enough not sounded pathetic, but moreâ€|irritated.

"I don't believe that." Astrid shook her head and walked in front of him. If he wasn't going to look at her, then she was going to make him look at her. "

"Oh really?" He teased in a snarky tone.

"Yes." She took a step closer. "What happened?"

"I had it hungâ€|in the tree." He began. "It was as good as dead, but I couldn't bring myself to end something's life. I've been preparing to kill my whole life, but when it came right down to it, I was nothing but a coward and it got away." He closed his eyes. "I meanâ€|_I_ let it go."

"But we didn't get killed." Astrid tried to force a smile. "So you did something right." She was expecting an effort from him to maybe take that as a compliment, but instead she got nothing. He only let out a huff of breath, his chest rising and falling in wide motions.

"I could hear it dying, Alastair." He said after many moments of silence. His voice was small. "I couldn't do it after I heard it dying."

"Wh-whatâ€|you heard it dying?" Astrid had never heard of such foolishness! That ability wasn't possibly, that much she knew. "Hiccaâ€|Prince Hiccup, do you realize how outlandish that sounds?"

"I'm aware, and if I wasn't trusting you to not completely laugh in my face I'd keep it to myself."

Astrid could only sigh. She had no idea what to say to that, at all. On one hand she couldn'tâ€"or perhaps just didn't know how toâ€"handle a prince that needed comfort. Especially after she failed to even protect him and he was spewing pity stories and crazy ideals of hearing death. Yet, on the other hand, she felt slightly privileged that the prince had somehow trusted her for something.

"Maybeâ€|" She decided to make it a little easier for both of them. "We should talk about this later, when we're both not soâ€|.well, like this."

_Finally _he looked at her. It was a dead glace, but a glance nonetheless. He looked drained and in too much thought but then looked over at her shoulder.

"I'm sorry about your shoulder." He said quietly.

"All in a day's work for being your bodyguard." She tried to lighten the mood, moving her shoulder back slightly only to feel the pain moments later. She winced.

Hiccup stood then, giving her what seemed like a small smile, and Astrid found it slightly amusing that her being injured was what made him finally snap out it.

"I told you not to move it." He told her.

**Man, this chapter was a butt to edit. And I think you can pretty much expect every chapter to be between 5,000-7,000 words. So that's good! **

Not too much to say about this chapter since it's all pretty self-explanatory. Hiccup's becoming a mass of conflicting impulses, he showed a dragon mercy. Toothless is just confused, and so is Astrid as to what Hiccup's really all about.

Review Responses:

**ShootMe002: I'm glad you like it! And, yeah, the grammer stuff. Editing is pretty odd for me. Sometimes I get tons of time to edit and then other times I don't. **

**LiveToTell: Thank you! I've always admired the idea of Astrid having to becoming a bodyguard to Hiccup. And sorry the update took so long, but I've been pretty busy since I graduation has been looming over me. **

Fjord Mustang: Yeah, I've been seriously busy lately, and although I try to just make shorter chapters, I'm just a long chapter kind of girl. But, I intend to see this story to the endâ€¦but that's a long ways away. And yes! You've completely gotten Hiccup's character already. The way he thinks is so conflicted it hard for him to keep his goals in the same direction especially since he's so shunned all the time. He wants one thing, but feels another way on everything he does, and it's beginning to catch up with him. But now he has a warrior constantly by his side, and a potential dragon that he showed mercyâ€"which makes it slightly different from the movie since the mercy line was more of a two way street in the filmâ€"he's going to grow and stop seeing the world through just how it effects him. It was odd to start off with the main character as spoiled and open minded yet so closed off, but it makes for a great developmental road that I can take. Especially with how this story is going to turn outâ€"Hiccup's going to go through quite a lot. And Hiccup's ability to hear dragon's thoughts is a bit choppy right now, but it'll become more fluent as the story progresses as well. But, you can already see how Toothless's thoughts are slightly moreâ€¦put together than the gronckle and the nightmare he faced before. Since the story is only told through Hiccup and Astrid's POVs, Toothless's personality will be revealed through Hiccup, but revealed nonetheless. Whew, long response XD

Crash and burn: Um, I don't know how to respond to thatâ€¦?

Starkiller173: Well, Astrid's true gender will obviously have to be addressed, but I don't want to spoil it. All I can say is be patient.

Adrine R.227: Yes! A large portion of this fic was based off of that book series. I loved the writing style of how when it was Alek's POV, Deryn was portrayed fully as Dylan. So, I figured it would work on in this story as well. And I've actually been thinking about doing betaâ€¦

Crazy nightfury lady: I feel like Hiccup was slightly bitter in the movie as well, it was hidden a little better, but there were certain little moment where I see he was pretty resentful. And I'm glad you like the story! I've got a lot planned for Hiccup, Astrid, and Toothless. They're go through quite a lot, so character development will certainly happen!

**Adam: They'll be forced to go through a lot together, so bonds in their friendship and overall relationship will happen. **

**Hicc: I'm not gonna lie, the first part of the story will favor the movie, but I have about 6 parts planned for this story, so it branches out quite a bit, even by the end of this part it'll become its own story entirely. But I get what you mean. And grammar, oh grammar, it's my worst quality, but luckily I got a little more time to edit this chapter. **

Thanks for the reviews, everyone! They make me motivated to sit down and crank out another 6,000 word chapter!

More on what's up with Toothless and life in the palace in the next chapter!

4. Placed and Curious

**Yay! This one didn't take as long to update! **

Not much to say beforehand other than a lot of stuff happens, and we're getting a better look at who Hiccup isâ€"or perhaps the lack of who he isâ€"andâ€|. Toothless!

Part One: We Are Challenging Fate

Chapter Four: Placed and Curious

Astrid took too much time healing for her liking.

She had neglected to tell anyone of her injury, because the last thing she needed was doctors prying at her shoulder. It was all too close to her chest and it would be just pathetic on her part for her to get discovered after only a week of duty.

Though, she had to admit, the first couple of days had been much more exciting than the last few. For the past five days, Astrid had been subjected to following Hiccup around. Running errands, attending boring meetings, and simply standing beside Hiccup while heâ€|stood beside his father.

Was this the 'glorious royal life' she had always heard of?

"Rise and Shine, Alastair!" Hiccup called for her, opening her door roughly and letting the creek of the stone door rack her brain. She pulled the covers over her head, groaning. Why hadn't she remembered to lock the door?

"Aren't I supposed to be waking you up, Prince Hiccup?" She muttered underneath the sheets, though when she heard his footsteps coming towards her bed she stiffened.

She didn't wear her chest bindings when she slept, and in the chill of the stone room it was more than obvious what lied beneath her sleeping tunic. She curled herself in the covers and bit her lip.

"Well, I have to eat breakfast a little earlier today." He said.

"And why is that?"

"I have another engagement meeting."

Her body contorted a little more under the sheets.

"Engagement meeting?" She cringed. "For you?"

"Yes, as hard as it is to believe, I do have engagements."

"Engage_ments_?" Astrid repeated. "As in more than one?"

She could practically hear him rolling his eyes. And then his hands

were bunched against her blanket.

"Come on, Alastair, I'll explain later, but you've gotta get up."

She smacked his hand away under the covers as best as she could, but for such a skinny boy, he did have an incredibly firm grip. He tugged at the sheets a little more, and her foot escaped, being whipped over with the chilled air of the room.

"Just leave me alone. I'll be up and dressed in a few minutes."

To her relief he let go.

"Fine, but I won't wait around for you, so you better be dressed in ten minutes or I'm dragging you out myself." Astrid only let out a snicker at that comment, knowing all too well that the prince couldn't drag her out of anything even if he tried his hardest.

Once she heard the door close, Astrid quickly rose from her bed, her feet touching the cold ground and she stared at her reflection in the mirror across from her. She sighed. Her hair was finally looking a little more even, since she cut it rather hastily on her bed weeks ago, but it still didn't make her feel any more like a boy.

She could feel her chest swelling more and more as was the norm for a girl her age. She was sure her monthly cycle was going to come any day now, and no matter how hard she tried her voice still squeaked. It was quiet embarrassing sometimes when she was talking to Hiccup and her voice would crack under the pressure of trying to sound lower, but he seemed to not care nonetheless.

Besides, she was sure he had more than enough on his mind. Since he could 'hear death' and all.

Astrid still wasn't sure how she felt about his odd accusation. But she'd be lying if she said she wasn't happy that they hadn't been back to see the dragon. Hiccup had expressed his want to go back and see it even though it was probably dead the very night he faced it. But, Astrid wasn't in a huge hurry to go back there.

The Night Fury had injured her after all. And it was dragons that killed her brotherâ€¦

So it was quite lucky that Hiccup had been too busy to sneak away back into the woods that week. But she had to admit that Prince Hiccup was turning out to be pretty good company even in the week she had been babysitting him. Certainly better than the girls back in Merkskofâ€¦

And that's when Astrid remembered Ruffnut. The girl crossed her mind often, but she hadn't given her much thought in the past few days. Dealing with Hiccup and his weird theories was more than enough to zap her mind. But, still, if she had a mission as weird as babysitting the prince, she could only imagine what Ruffnut was getting herself into.

And with that she stood and got dressed.

"I thought we were going to eat breakfast?" Astrid slumped as she walked behind Hiccup.

"We are." Hiccup answered.

"Then why are we heading towards the bathhouse?"

"To bathe." Hiccup replied, turning to give her a brow lift, like she was stupid or something. "Duh," he added.

"Don't 'duh' me," she huffed, her breathing quickening at the very thought of the bathhouse. She hadn't been in there once she since moved into the palace resorting to simply scrubbing herself with a wet rag and bowl of water every night in the privacy of her quarters. "Why are we going, other than the obvious?"

"Well, Arte makes a point to always tell me to bathe before engagement meetings. You know how women are, always particular about those things."

"Um, yeah."

"You seem off today," Hiccup noted.

"I suppose." Astrid's gaze flicked over to him. Was it really that obvious?

"Well, just try not to fall asleep in the bath."

The Bathhouse itself was pretty large. But then again, everyone in the palace all used the same one. The King had his own private corner, as did Hiccup, but everyone else simply had to fend for themselves in the mass muddle of open space. And of course, there didn't seem to be any different between the men's and women's side.

Although Astrid was expecting it to be mostly empty in the late morning as was the bathhouse in Merkskof it was quite full. And with warriors nonetheless. She gulped.

The few women in the bath seemed to all gravitate towards a certain part of the bath, but there were so many men in there, anyone who even had the suggestion of breasts would be an elephant in the room.

"I didn't know all the warriors were bathing now." Hiccup sighed, his features literally dropping at the sight of all of them. "Great," he breathed sarcastically. "Why didn't you tell me?" He asked her angrily.

"What makes you think I knew?" Astrid shrugged.

"Well, I don't know. Don't warriors talk or something?"

"I've barely spoken to any of these people, Prince Hiccup." Astrid shook her head. "I'm always stuck with you and I don't even sleep in the warrior's quarters."

Hiccup simply said "oh" and continued walking over this bathing

corner, taking off his shirt and pants. He turned towards Astrid, looking perplexed while she just stood there.

But what else was she supposed to do? She definitely couldn't bathe with all the warriors and Hiccup in the bath. But then again, she didn't particularly want to stand there and watch the prince bathe either.

"Okay, why are you just standing there?" Hiccup asked, eyeing her carefully. "You might as well get in too."

"Um, no." Astrid choked out, her voice failing again. "I mean, I'm good. I'll, uh just wait."

If she had to choose between being found out and standing around the prince while he bathed, she'd rather pick the later. She had a much lesser chance of being found out that way.

But, of course, things weren't that easy.

"Well, lovely seeing you and you babysitter out this early." Astrid heard a particular voice behind her. "I thought you'd be in your room drooling for at least another hour."

It was the next in line behind Hiccup. Warrior Duke Snotlout Haddock.

Astrid found it odd that she wasn't more taken back by the fact that she was meeting the person who would probably become the next king completely wet and naked. Instead she was pretty blank minded. She got more flustered at Hiccup being naked then this guy.

She still hadn't had to 'pleasure' of really meeting any of the warriors, let alone Snotlout, but Hiccup had already told her where he stood in terms of all the warriors. In short, they hated him, they teased him! 'what else is new?' is what Hiccup had said. Still, there seemed to be some unwritten code between warriors, since even though they hadn't met Snotlout gave her a friendly smile. Warrior to warrior, she supposed.

"What do you want, Snotlout?" Hiccup sighed, almost about to get in the bath.

"Nothing, just wishing you luck on your little meeting today." He laughed a bit, giving Hiccup a good once over. "You're going to need it with that small sample of yours."

Hiccup immediately blushed, and Astrid was ashamed to admit she did as well. Hiccup just hopped off the edge and into the water, frowning.

"At least I have engagement meetings." Hiccup said promptly. "You know, actually being with a woman is better than just saying you can get more."

"Oh please, I've been with more women then you can count." Snotlout laughed. "And not those little dainty things Uncle Stoick sends you. I'm talking about real women." Snotlout nudged Astrid in the side, and she immediately jumped, though he didn't seem to notice. "Isn't that right, Alastair? You seem like a well rounded guy."

"Um, sure." Astrid shrugged. Wanting to abort the conversation more than anything else. Her mother had paired her up with many boys, but she couldn't say that. It was quite amusing, though, if only her mother could see her now. Short hair, un-plucked legs, a scratched shoulder, and being surrounded by naked men in the palace's bath.

"I'm just sorry you got stuck babysitting this mess of a person." Snotlout told her. "But when he blows his chance at another girl, maybe you can move in on her."

Astrid let out a dry laugh, smiling weakly. "Haha, yeah.." She frowned when she looked over at Hiccup who had a seemingly disappointed look on her face.

"Why don't you come over here with the rest of us, Alastair. Smallness is contagious." Snotlout gave Hiccup smirk, and Hiccup scowled.

"Actually." Hiccup called out and quickly got out of the water. "Alastair was just about to get me my breakfast."

"Hmp, and I thought he was just your babysitter, I guess he's your maid too." Snotlout rolled his eyes. "I'll catch you later Alastair."

"Yeahâ€|see you." Astrid flaunted a small wave and turned to frown at Hiccup.

"Sorry," Hiccup shrugged haphazardly. "But I wouldn't want my bodyguard to turn over to the dark side."

Astrid's frown slackened. She supposed she could understand that much. Although they were barely friends, she could always remember the look of relief on his face that day in the woods, when she was finally honest with him. She sighed and sat down near the edge of the water, only to half gasp when Hiccup walked up next her, his skin shining.

"Oh, but I wasn't joking." He smiled. "You can go get my breakfast. I enjoy a nice meal while I bathe every once in a while."

"You want me to feed you too?" Astrid crossed her arms.

"No, no," He finally sank back into the water. "That's Arte's job."

Astrid's jaw dropped.

"Kidding." Hiccup raised his hands in mock-surrender. "But you gotta admit, the look on your face was priceless."

0o0

Astrid walked with a plate of fish cut into cubes, some grapes, and an assortment of herbs and edible leaves. She only shook her head. As a warrior, she mostly ate chicken and other kinds of meats that the hunting parties brought in. But certainly nothing so dainty for breakfast.

"Um, excuse me, but do you know where the Prince's dining hall is?"

Astrid looked up to see a small framed girl staring up at her. Pink cheeks, tight clothes, and long black hair that matched her large dark eyes.

She knew this girlâ€|

"Ash Eyes?" Astrid said without thinking. Ash Eyes Genson, the daughter of the Chief of Merkskof, and named for her darker than dark eyes. Her mother always used Ash Eyes as a template for what she wanted Astrid to be, all soft spoken and beautiful, and Astrid shuddered to think that this could've been what she became.

"Um, yesâ€|have we met?" Astrid almost smacked her forehead for being so stupid. Ash Eyes would certainly remember Astrid Hofferson, but not Alastair Hofferson. She only hoped the girl wouldn't recognize what lied beneath the surface.

"No!" Astrid said all too quickly. "I just..uhâ€|heard you were coming."

"Oh, you heard of my engagement meeting with the Prince?" She smiled.

"Yeahâ€|I did." Astrid blinked and tried not to snort. Ash Eyes and Hiccup having an engagement meeting? That was sure to be interesting.

"Soâ€|do you know where the Prince's dining hall is? I'm supposed to meet him there."

"You'll have to ask someone else. I'm not too familiar with this place yet." Astrid smiled weakly at the girl and she smiled as well, skipping past her in a giddy manner.

"Thank you." She hummed and kept walking. Astrid, on the other hand, heard her stomach churn.

Despite having to babysit a prince, Astrid would've chosen anything then ending up like Ash Eyes.

0o0

Astrid became accustomed to staring blankly forward while Hiccup bathed and ate, trying not to get the image of him naked burned into her brain more than it already was.

Luckily, it wasn't long before Hiccup got himself dressed in his best clothes and began to make his way to his Dining Hall.

Hiccup barely ate thereâ€"always preferring to eat in his roomâ€"so it seemed unused and practically brand new. He mentioned a few days ago that he didn't care for eating in a large room by himself, since his father was always too busy to eat dinner with his son, and he had no siblings.

Astrid was there to simply stand beside Hiccup, as usual, and King

Stoick stood in front while Ash Eyes and a representative from Merkskof entered the room.

"My father sends his apologies for not being able to come here." Ash Eyes said softly.

"Not a problem," Stoick nodded. "Though I would like you to meet the reason you're here." He stepped aside and revealed Hiccup standing behind him. "My Son, Prince Hiccup Haddock III."

Astrid almost wanted to pull Hiccup away when he walked up to Ash Eyes, but she resisted. She could barely stand to see what she was escaping from happening right before her. Arranged marriages and being forced onto someone she barely knew.

But still, Hiccup walked up to Ash Eyes, stood closely and kissed her cheek.

"You look beautiful." He said, almost robotically.

"Thank you, Prince Hiccup." Ash Eyes blushed, some hair falling in front of her eyes.

"Let's go and talk." He took her hand, and Ash Eyes followed him blindingly, still smiling at every touch he gave her. Astrid rolled her eyes, not seeing the appeal.

Other than being a prince, Hiccup simply seemed like every other whiny teenager she had met. But then again, every girl was installed with the want to be with the Prince, despite his reputation, no one would think twice about a girl's worthiness if she had an engagement meeting with the prince. He was a prize to be won, that much was certain.

As Hiccup led Ash Eye's to his room, Astrid was instructed to stand in front of his door while Stoick and Merskof's representative spoke on business terms in the dining hall.

The whole thing was quite uncomfortable. She didn't make a point to press her ear against the door to try and hear what was going on.

"How long have they been in there?" Arte asked.

"About two hours!" Astrid slumped, her feet hurt and her patience had faded but there she still stood. She turned and looked at the door with a raised brow. "Are they really doing what I think they're doing in there?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. Prince Hiccup never tells anyone what goes on during his engagement meetings. He just always leads the girls into his room while his father takes care of the deal."

"The..deal?" Astrid blinked.

"Young Prince Haddock has about twenty engagements already, and he'll continue to get more until he supposedly takes the throne at eighteen."

"Princes can't get married?" Astrid asked, finding it silly to wait until he was king to get married.

"It was his father's choice to hold off his marriage until he was older." Arte snickered. "I guess he's hoping he'll grow a little more before then."

Astrid offered a weak smile, but other than that felt no need to continue the conversation. Still, the whole thought of it was unsettling. Hiccup didn't seem like the type to mess with girls on that level. But he was a prince, after all.

It was another hour when Ash Eyes emerged from the room, looking happy. Hiccup followed shortly after her, though he just looked exhausted. Astrid immediately met his gaze, giving him a questioning squint of her eyes. He flicked his eyes to meet her stare, but offered little but a 'we'll take later' brush off before going back up to Ash Eyes.

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"Talk" Astrid immediately demanded as soon as Hiccup walked in from the long dinner he, Ash Eyes, King Stoick, and Merkskof's representative had. Astrid had simply stood beside the table, and was having dinner brought to her by Arte at the moment. But food was the last thing on her mind, she wanted answers.

"You're obviously not accustomed to engagement meetings." Hiccup shook his head. "Didn't you have any back in Merkskof?"

"Of course I did." Astrid darted her gaze around. She had engagement meetings with many boys, most of which ended with her slapping them and her mother reprimanding her all the way home. "But I'm not a prince, now am I?"

"Engagement meetings are one of the few days that my father actually seems." He sighed. "Proud of me." He gave Astrid a weak smile "Keep the girl entertained and happy, he always says."

"So you have sex with her!?" Astrid stood, losing the depth to her voice. "Do you have any idea what losing their virginity so suddenly does to a girl?"

There was an awkward silence that lingered.

After her breathing regulated, Astrid realized how silly her actions were, especially when she saw Hiccup's perplexed yet slightly amused face.

"You think?" His smirk widened. "I didn't." He swallowed. "With Ash Eyes."

"Really now?" Astrid wasn't buying it.

"Swear to Odin." Hiccup raised his right hand. Quickly, though, he looked to the side and frowned. "It's really not what you think Alastair." He let out a heavy heave. "When I first started these meetings two years ago I was just twelve and I well, I was really nervous about this stuff. I would be awkward and quiet and I was never really interested in any of the girls. But then, I realized

that my attitude was deterring people from sending their daughters over."

"So now you do this?" Astrid raised a brow, seeming madder than she actually was. She was glad Hiccup was opening up to her, but the mind of this prince was still hard to read. He did things out of spite, yet out of need, out of want, and out of change. She wished she could just peg who he was, but she couldn't.

Hiccup probably didn't even know who he was yet.

"Romancing them for a few hours is better than being myself. Saying the right things, telling them how beautiful they are." Hiccup sighed. "Then my father's happy and I keep girls coming here until I'm eighteen."

"So do you?" Astrid darted her eyes around. She couldn't believe she was asking this. "Have you kissed a girl yet?"

"Of course I have." Hiccup let out a laugh. "What do you think romancing is?"

"Just..checking." Astrid was biting back from giggling. She wouldn't peg the prince as the experienced type at all, even if she had thought much worse.

"Though I can't say I'm the best at it." He still laughed in spite of himself. "And why are you acting so shocked? Seems like the 'great Alastair' shouldn't have a problem impressing women."

"Oh, you'd think so." Astrid couldn't help but let out a laugh herself. She'd never kissed a woman, of course. Not even a man yet.

"But maybe I'm overestimating you?" Hiccup smirked, his eyes filled with amusement. "I thought all you warriors were as well off with women as Snotlout."

"I'm not as experienced as you think, Prince Hiccup." Astrid said without thinking.

"Well that's good to know." Hiccup stood. "So, how about we go?"

"Go where?" Astrid raised a brow. She had figured with all the 'excitement' of the engagement meeting, Hiccup would want to stay in. Though she couldn't help but feel more than ready to get into another one of his crazy antics after the past boring couple of days.

"The dragon." Hiccup answered. "I know you were unconscious but don't tell me you've forgotten."

"Oh, the 'you hear the dead' dragon?" Astrid teased, but Hiccup was less then amused.

"That's not funny Alastair." His brows tightened. "I wanna know what this means."

"Maybe you're just paranoid?" Astrid tried to persuade him. She was all for a wacky expedition, but not going to look for a live dragon that would surely kill him the next time around. "You could be

killed."

"Yeah, maybe. But what if I'm not paranoid? What if I really can hearâ€¦dead dragons?"

"Do you even hear yourself?" Astrid smacked her forehead. What was wrong with this boy?

"Well, whether you're coming or not I'm checking this out." Hiccup began to take for the door, eyes determined and stubborn. Astrid sighed. She knew by now that there was no stopping the prince when his heart was set on some kind of ridiculous notion of self finding.

She had only known him a week, but even so she had some kind of longing for the prince. Not for him specifically, but a longing for him to find himself in _something_. Astrid had been blessed with self awareness with what she wanted from her life for so long, even if it seemed hard. But Hiccupâ€¦he was so lost, and it was almost painful to watch him sometimes.

Still, she took off her cape, finding it unnecessary for late night forest walks and followed after him as quickly as possible.

And when Arte returned with Astrid's dinner, she was met with an empty room.

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The night left the forest drier then Hiccup had remembered it days ago. The fogged forest was now exposed and every step he took left a crunch of leaves that resonated throughout the entire forest.

And with a deadly night fury's sensitive ears anywhere in that forest, Hiccup had to be extra careful.

But luckily he had Alastair with him.

The boy trailed behind him slowly, axe in hand and steps light. Hiccup patted his dagger strapped to his waist sash. Alastair may've thought they'd be killed, but Hiccup had a certain air of calmness about him that mixed with his careful steps. The week had been so busy, so full of pleasing others Hiccup was glad to get back to something that was for him.

Unlike the last two encounters. His encounter with the night fury had been filling his every thought. Raids had been slow since the one when he was attacked by the nightmare, so Hiccup didn't have the luxury of trying out his skills again. But he decided to take any dull time he hadâ€”when he was standing around near his father and Alastair giving off the illusion of presenceâ€”to open his mind. He had always been a thinker, and inventor, but never had he thought of trying to read someone else's mind. Sure, he had wished he could read his father's mind, but had never actually tried it.

He gave a small peak over to Alastair. Despite him being displeased with roaming around in the woods at night looking for danger, he still came with him. Half of him expected so just because the boy was his bodyguard. Still, he would be needed since he was going to look for the Night Fury toâ€¦

He paused.

What _was_ he looking for exactly?

Killing was definitely out, but what else was left? Talk to it? Blackmail it? Observe it? Each had it's own risks and benefits. But that was all assuming the dragon couldn't kill him right on the spot.

"You're awfully quiet" Alastair noted. His voice piercing Hiccup's thought and making him jump a bit.

"Wh-! What?" Hiccup yelped.

"I said you're quiet." Alastair rolled his eyes. "Feeling nervous?"

"Nervous about what?"

"Well I would offer a response, but that's if I knew what we were doing." Alastair stopped and Hiccup saw that he was not amused once again. So, he stopped as well, sighing. He wasn't in the mood to hear Alastair complain. "Are we going to watch this thing, or capture itâ€|or do you wanna 'hear the dead' again?"

Hiccup almost laughed as the boy's thoughts mirrored his own.

"I'm not sure." Hiccup shrugged and kept walking. And what made him think that would enough the calm down Alastair, he didn't know. Alastair stopped him once more, grabbing his shoulder and jerking him back.

"You're not sure?" Alastair repeated in mock. "We're walking through some Thor forsaken forest in the middle of the night looking for a night fury and _you're not sure_?" He shook his head. "You're going to have to do better than that."

"What do you want from me, Alastair?" Hiccup sucked his teeth. "This is already weird enough, so I'm just going with it."

"Going with your silly claim to hear dead dragon's thoughts?" Alastair let out a breathed laugh. "So you're going to talk to this night fury and then whatâ€|huh?"

"I don't know!" Hiccup yelled.

"Well you better figure it out!"

"I will when I get there!"

"No, now, because if you wing it you're going to get in trouble and I'm going to have to save you."

"Well, that is your job isn't it? You swore to my father you'd protect me, isn't that true?"

Alastair was silent, and Hiccup felt pleased. That got him.

"You know," Hiccup continued to speak, not really thinking about what

he was saying. "All you do is complain when I want to do things like this. You're cousin, Atlas, he would've never complained. He was one of the only warriors I ever looked up to and even if he had to babysit someone he would've just sucked it up and dealt with it, unlike yoâ€" "

It was when Alastair shoved him to the ground when he realized he probably should've kept that to himself. Hiccup wasn't going to cheat himself in thinking 'how dare someone push him down'. But, he didn't really expect Alastair to do it anyways. The boy's cousin must've been his trigger.

"Alastair," Hiccup began, shifting his weight as he stood. Though he could see that Alastair wasn't pleased. His head hung into his collar, and his eyes were covered by his long bangs. "I'm sorry, I should've said that."

"Yeah, you shouldn't have." Alastair muttered darkly and picked up the axe he had dropped in his impulsive act of shoving Hiccup over. "Go do whatever you want, Prince Hiccup."

And he began to walk away.

"Oh come on Alastair, don't be so dramatic!" Hiccup called after him.

No answer.

"Fine!" Hiccup yelled. The protection would've been nice but Hiccup had been able to hold his own last time he faced the dragon. Maybe he didn't even need Alastair.

And with that, he turned and began walking the other way.

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It was almost an hour later when Hiccup found a rock nestled opening to shield him from the late night rain. He wiped the rain water from his bangs and brow and let out a sigh.

This wasn't going the way he wanted at all.

He had no Alastair, it was pouring rain, and his father had to have figured out he wasn't in his room. He almost scowled Hiccup figured that it was probably Alastair he went back to palace and told on him.

He looked out to the wooded clearing beneath the rocky opening, even at the far away distance he could see the raindrops falling into the lake at the center. It brought him peace for a brief moment before he stood, ready for all it was worth to go back home and faceâ€|well, everyone.

Suddenly lightning filled his vision, and when crackling and burst of white light cleared there was something midnight and black before him. But it wasn't the sky.

A loud screech tingled his ears and then there was clawing. It didn't take long for Hiccup to put two and two together and realize that the midnight he saw before was the night fury he'd face days before.

He froze almost immediately when he heard a voice again. One that wasn't his.

::Must get out:: The thoughts told him and the dragons continued to claw at the rocks, growling and determined. Hiccup still just stood frozen, not knowing why he couldn't move. And when his eyes met with the dragons he thought he'd pass out. It's gaze was icy, cold, yet soft and saddened all at the same time.

::That humanâ€¢!:: The dragon noted, thought the biting realization the thoughts had made Hiccup shiver. It wasn't happy to see him, and Hiccup didn't blame it.

The dragons finally lost its grip and slipped down to the grassy clearing, spreading its wings to lighten the fall. Hiccup was too enticed by the look in its eyes to make a rational choice and stepped back into the rain towards the clearing. Wanting a closer look.

It was late into the night, days after he had almost killed the creature, and it looked as springy as ever. Determination to get out of the clearing was probably boiling the dragon's blood, and Hiccup was bitterly reminded that it was his fault the dragon was stuck in the clearing in the first place.

He had caused it to lose its tail fin after all.

Suddenly, Hiccup was feeling quite foolish for seeking out the dragon. Although this dragon seemed smarter than average, was it really intelligent enough to forgive? A dragon's first instinct was always to kill a human, what made this dragon any different? For even if it couldn't forgive, he knew that one thing a dragon could do was hold a grudge.

Their eyes met again even in the distance between them.

::Leave...: Hiccup could hear a faint whisper. But it was too far away for him to hear the rest. He gulped. So what if he did leave? He'd always be wondering of his ability, always be afraid of dragons, always ask himself what if he had tried?

::I'm not leaving: Hiccup stood shakily but unmoving. "Why should I leave!?" He yelled aloud. He had no idea whether or not the dragon could hear him all the way from the cliff side, or if it understood him when he spoke aloud. But whatever the dragons heard, it made him angry.

::Foolish human. Hiccup heard before another lightning crack and just as before when the white light faded the dragon was clawing forward at the rocks surrounding the clearing yet again. Or at least, so it seemed. When the dragon got to the cliff side where Hiccup stood, it clawed onto the ledge in a struggle and although Hiccup cautiously took a step backâ€¢his heart beginning to raceâ€¢the dragon just grabbed him by his foot and dragged him down into the clearing as it fell.

Hiccup landed not too comfortably on his bum when the dragon nearly fell out of the air, not able to control what little motor skills it had left with a human in tow. Hiccup looked down at his left boot.

The dragon had bit his boot, but not the skin. Still, there was rather noticeable teeth markings in the side. One his father wouldn't be too pleased of especially since he had just sent the boots out to be tailored a week ago.

"You told me to leave and then you just snag me down here?" Hiccup shouted. At first impulseâ€"while being dragged downâ€"he thought that he was going to be ripped apart as soon as he hit the surface. But the dragon seemed more occupied with frantically looking up at the sky then with him. And there was something oddly more unsettling about being ignored by the dragons then being half ripped to shreds. Hiccup got closer to the dragon, but as soon as he did it calmed. Done with its survey of the sky for the moment. It let out a sigh of relief.

_:::Clear for nowâ€|:: _Hiccup heard it say.

"Clear of what?" He asked aloud, still not knowing why he was speaking to it when whatever ability he had was clearly a mind over matter affair. But the dragon looked over to him, eyes wide and looking straight at his boot. It lookedâ€|satisfied to say the least.

:::As it should be. The dragon thought.

Hiccup followed its vision, looking as his boot. "Oh, so you find this amusing, huh?" He scowled again, and placed a hand on his dagger. But the dragon seemed to have a better memory to small details than Hiccup gave it credit for, and it immediately bore its teeth at him, pouncing on him seconds later.

Hiccup breathed heavily in shock, not knowing why he hadn't expected that in the first place.

:::Try to hurt me again!?:: The dragon's thought roared. And Hiccup saw a certain insanity in its eyes. _:::Won't die at human handsâ€|:: _A back thought from the dragon fluttered into Hiccup's own mind.

Hiccup looked down at his dagger, clutched tightly into his hands and shaking heavily. This dragon was serious, and up close its teeth looked sharp. Too sharp.

:::Won't hurt. Hiccup made sure to try his ability again. Not knowing if the dragon would hear and understand him if he outwardly spoke. _:::I won't hurt youâ€|:_ He added for good measure.

:::Speaking out of fear. The dragon responded. _:::Wise for a human._

:::Wise for a dragon. Hiccup answered just as cunningly. He felt a sharpness clutch his right hand, dragon claws in his wrist and palm. He winced as the dragon got up from him, but as it's claw raised, his dagger was taken with it.

Hiccup was too timid to even defend his own dagger, and the look in the dragon's eyes didn't look like it was playing. It dropped the dagger on the ground in front of Hiccup, eyeing him carefully.

_:::Choice?::: _The dragon challenged him, eye's carefully squinted, yet still searching him. It was eerie for Hiccup, not just because he was in a cove alone with a deadly night fury, but because it was challenging him. Telling him to either pick up his dagger and defend himself or leave himself completely defenseless. The standoff alone made the rain pouring down on him seem utterly insignificant.

Trust was certainly something Hiccup didn't take lightly. But his choice might mean the different between whether the dragon killed him on the spot or gave him a judgment period. He let out a sigh and looked down at his dagger, the dagger that belonged to his mother, given to him by his father. Cherished beyond belief to Vikings was a weapon because it stood for their ability to take power, to take someone's life and gain it for their own. Just as his mother had stained many grounds with the blood of her victims, and the small amount of blood Hiccup has shed wounding the dragon that stood before him.

He looked back up at the night fury, its eyes still piercing.

_:::Your mind is racing::: _ The dragon said, though Hiccup sensed an odd twinge of amusement in its voice. But it faded quickly as it looked back down at the dagger _:::Blood of mine was on that object::: it reminded him. _:::Its haunting:::

Hiccup's eyes widened. And suddenly it wasn't just about hearing the dragon dying all those days ago. It was just about hearing what it thought. How something so smallâ€"a simple daggerâ€"could haunt a powerful beast was beyond Hiccup. But all of a sudden, withholding the legend of the dagger didn't seem as important anymore.

He reached down and picked it up, trying not to be deterred by the dragon's growl in thinking he was being betrayed, but instead he gave the dragon a light smile and tossed it in the lake without a second thought.

If anything else, Hiccup could tell the dragon was shocked, it blinked rapidly before sitting down, and Hiccup was glad to finally see the dragon relaxed for once. Its whole stature seemed far less intimidating when it was like that. And somehow the midnight in its body seemed less dark, even in the rain hugged night.

He looked up at the rain, though not as significant with all the occurrences happening, but it had slowed a bit. Still, being soaked through didn't seem immensely important.

_:::Odd human::: _The dragon sniffed, still seeming a little shocked.

"You're odd yourself." Hiccup smiled a bit and spoke without thinking, and then still wondered if the dragon could really understand him when spoke aloud. Certainly the dragon made an indication that it heard him, but its mind was blank for the moment. "Can you understand me?" Hiccup just asked point blank.

No answer.

"I guess notâ€|" Hiccup sighed. It would be easier for him to just

speak to the dragon, but he supposed that wasn't the point of his ability.

_::So, what's your name?:: _Hiccup asked inwardly instead.

::Name?::

::Do dragons not have names?::

_::We do not answer to callings.:: _The dragons answered. Though Hiccup didn't know what exactly 'a calling' was, but he just took that as a no. _::Can all humans speak in our tongue?::_

::I'm going to assume not: Hiccup let out a light laugh. He certainly wasn't about to go back to Berk and scream that he could talk to dragons to the sky, and he was sure if anyone else had his ability, they wouldn't either. So maybe there wereâ€?

_::Odd human:: _The dragon repeated, though it gave him a scowl all of a sudden, looking rash. _::Dangerous human:_

Hiccup knew exactly what the dragon was getting at. He had injured it, almost killed it. Still, he moved a little closer, his bootsâ€"one scoffed and one wholeâ€"sinking into the rain soaked ground. But the dragon immediately clenched up at his steps forwards. And it was then when Hiccup noticed its teeth came down as they were bared. He squinted, wishing he could get a better look.

_::What do you seek?:: _The dragon asked.

_::Your teeth, they weren't there a second ago:: _Hiccup half answered, but he was still absorbed in looking at the dragon's gums.

::You areâ€|surprisedâ€|?::

_::Well, dragons have teeth. Not gums:: _Hiccup almost laughed.

_::I am not of normal dragons.:: _The dragon told him, and even though the words where filled with authority, Hiccup sensed more of a mechanical reciting to them. Like the dragon had said it beforeâ€|_::Same for youâ€|human:_

::My name's Hiccup. Prince Hiccup.::

_::Prince?:: _The dragon questioned, though Hiccup couldn't tell if it was because it didn't know what the word meant or because he didn't understand how a human like him could be a prince. Either notion would've been understandable.

_::Well, that part isn't so important. Just Hiccup is fine.::

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_::This inconsistency is why we don't answer to callings:: _The dragon turned its nose.

::But then what am I going to call you?:: Hiccup asked.

::I do not need a calling::

::Everyone needs a name.

::No name. No calling.

Hiccup sucked his teeth. This dragon was more stubborn than Alastair. And then his mind flickered up to the top of the clearing. He knew he should've thought more of the boy, but he still wondered if Alastair really had gone back to the palace and reported him. Certainly the boy would be giving up his position to be a warrior if he admitted he lost the prince in the woods. But, he still did storm off.

::Your mind is racing again. The dragon simply stared at him, judging. _::Waiting for someone?_

::Not really, Hiccup trailed. Though he really was wondering if some kind of search party would come to clearing to find him standing before a dragon, and not killing it on first sight.

::Though it's probably best that I leave. Hiccup scratched the back of his neck. He wasn't sure if he'd see the dragon again, but he made a point not to let the thought burn a hole in his brain. Oddly enough, though, he didn't need to.

::Will we meet again? The dragon asked, though Hiccup could sense that it was hesitant in asking. Half of the dragon didn't want to see him ever again, but then the other half was curious.

Just like him, Hiccup supposed.

::Yesâ€|we will. Hiccup gave the dragon the firmest nod he could, and took yet another step closer, but the dragon still backed away, bearing its teeth from its gums another time. Hiccup gave a crooked look, finding it odd that the most powerful dragon had the ability to lookâ€|toothless.

::You look at me in questioningâ€|why? The dragon asked.

"Toothlessâ€|" Hiccup mused to himself, a small smile grazing his lips. But the dragon only offered him an inquisitive look. Not understanding him.

::Toothless. Hiccup said inwardly.

::Foolish, I own teeth. The dragon snuffed.

::No, no, you're calling. It'll be Toothless.

The dragon was taken aback. Looking utterly disgusted with the name.

::And who are you to give me a calling? The dragon continued, but another crack of lighting broke the sky suddenly, and its eyes cut upwards when a scream seemed to fall out of the noise.

A human scream.

Hiccup knew that scream, even if he had only heard it once, he knew that scream. The scream he thought he'd never hear.

Alastair's scream.

:::Alastair!::: Hiccup's mind jolted, and he ran towards the end of the clearing, but the dragon's teeth caught his shirt, keeping him back.

:::Stay. The dragon told him, in a similar manner to when he dragged him down in the cove in the first place. _:::It is dangerous._

:::Which is why I should leave, Hiccup countered.

:::No, stay.

Another crack in the sky revealed Alastair tumbling down in the rocks into the cove. It was a crunching fall, one that probably would've killed Hiccupâ€¦but not Alastair. The boy stood on wobbling feet, but still stood. His axe still in hand and hair looking wild. Two monstrous nightmares came stomping after him, and the small cove was suddenly filled with chaos.

Then Hiccup saw the two nightmares stop in their pursuit of Alastair as soon as they saw the night fury, and just shoved the boy aside into more rocks.

:::Hide. The night fury told him quickly, and Hiccup did just so, running and hiding in the shadows of the night before he made his way over to Alastair.

"Are you okay?" He asked the boy, placing a careful hand on his shoulder.

"Hic-Hiccup?" Alastair looked up drowsily. Taking everything in, but Hiccup already grabbed his hand, running him and Alastair behind a boulder. "What's going on?" Alastair asked in a hissed whisper.

"I-I don't know." Hiccup bit his lip, and peeked around the side of the boulder, seeing the two nightmares encircling the night fury. Although it didn't look the least intimidated by the dragons, Hiccup still found himself worrying.

Worrying about the Night Fury.

Worrying about Toothlessâ€¦

**Well, hopefully that was 8,000 words well read. I really enjoyed writing this one even if it did end on a somewhat confusing cliffhanger. It's probably because I've been dying to write for Toothless! **

Anyways, next chapter we get some more insight on what the heck these two Nightmares want with Toothless, and Alastair less-than-impressive entrance to the cove.

**Review Responses: **

**Phenomenally Extraordinary: Thank you! I'm glad this is your favoriteâ€¦because I've read some pretty good onesâ€¦and thanks for noticing all the detail I put into everything. I kind of do that

without thinking by now, but at least it's still noticed! **

**Crash and burnn: Well there was kind of some of that in the story. Snotlout wouldn't be hitting on Astrid though, since no one knows she's a girl. **

**Ace Legend: Thank you! And I knowâ€œI'm trying to work on updating faster. **

**Crazy nightfury lady: I glad you liked it! And I too, wished the subject of his tail fin had actually been shown, but it was rated PG, so I might as well put it in this story. And yes, Hiccup is a brat, he had a dark side, and he has a sympathetic side. In this story we'll see that Hiccup has a lot of sides mainly becauseâ€œas Astrid said in this chapterâ€œhe doesn't know who he is. He's just a huge mass of conflicting impulses because of want to be a part of society and yet not to be a part of society. And I couldn't imagine Astrid during the encounter either, she would've dominated too much. Though her encounter with Toothless can't be put off forever. And I'm considering beta for this story, just because these chapter are long and I never catch everything. **

Lunnar Child: Well, this chapter is longer than the other, so hopefully that holds you until the next update!

**Adrine R.227: Thank you! I'm glad you like the story, and I'm still working on getting a beta soon, so hopefully that help with the grammar stuff. **

Whitebengal14: I'm so glad you reviewed and that you like the story! And although I am going to be taking elements from the movie, the book, and Viking culture/lore, there is plenty of original stuff in this story as well. Especially as the story goes on, it'll take a pretty unexpected route. So just enjoy! And you didn't have to wait too long for the next chapter at all!

**Thank you for the reviews everyone! (I always get paranoid that no one's reading this). Next chapter's got so info in it that you won't wanna miss. So stay tuned! **

5. Overheard and Prioritized

**Alrighty, I feel like after 4 seriously long chapters of build up an actual plot building conflict is coming into play. I suppose this is where it kind of veers off from the movie path a little, but it's still there. **

**And I'm sorry this took so incredibly looooong to update. But just in case any of you don't know I'm one of the co-admins for Berk's Grapevineâ€œ. and if you follow that site you know that it's been swamped with new info from comic con lately. So, I've been busy with that among other things. **

**Onwards to the chapter. **

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Five: Overheard and Prioritized

Hiccup's breathing labored even though he knew the dragons were no longer interesting in Alastair.

"What's going on?" Alastair asked, but all Hiccup could do was peek over the boulder at the three dragons before him, one of which being Toothless.

"I-I don't know." Hiccup stammered, still looking over, but when he didn't hear a response from Alastair, he finally looked over at the boy. Luckily he didn't look too hurt—"banged up and a little cut on his nose, but not seriously hurt. "Are you okay?" Hiccup felt it right to ask. Even if he and Alastair weren't on the best terms at the moment. It could wait.

"I'm fine, Prince Hiccup." Alastair shook his head, but answered more quietly than Hiccup had ever heard him speak. And, if he didn't know better, he sounded shaken up. Scared even. Hiccup knew he was always putting warriors on an impossible scale of dealing with things, but Alastair hadn't even seemed phased after Toothless knocked him out.

"Well what happened?" Hiccup kept his voice low as well, but then it was Alastair's turn to have faded interest. The boy was peeking over the boulder, staring at the three dragons.

"What are they doing?" Alastair muttered to himself, his eyes squinting. "Prince Hiccup," he called. "Can you hear them?"

Hiccup turned towards the dragons again, at first glance, they were all just staring each other down, growling and baring their teeth. Hiccup didn't know how many minds he could read at once, but he supposed then was as good a time as any.

Hiccup didn't offer a response when he closed his eyes, focusing his mind on the dragons before him. He still hadn't figured out how his ability worked, but whenever he concentrated he was able to achieve it.

_:::Why are you here?::: _Toothless asked, looking calm even though the bigger dragons circled him. He tucked his tail underneath himself.

_:::Over human prisons::: _One of them answered. It was only then when Hiccup realized the slight difference between just the simple words that came from the other dragon's mouths—and then Toothless's. He had heard that Night Fury's were strong, quick, elusive. Anyone who got near one was killed on the spot. But he supposed that they were even more intelligent than humans gave them credit for.

_:::What about them?::: _Toothless pressed.

_:::Captured more of us::: _One of them answered.

_:::They've always done this.::: _Toothless rolled his eyes. _:::It's just what humans do.:::_

:::You defend them?:::

:::No.:::

_:::Good::: _

_:::One of them says a human can hear us::: _The other continued.

Toothless's eyes widened and Hiccup saw that the night fury gave a quick glance over to him, squinting when their eyes met. Hiccup gasped and ducked his head down so that he was completely hidden.

"What's wrong?" Alastair immediately asked. "What did you hear?"

"Theyâ€œ| Hiccup swallowed. It wasn't that the other dragons could communicate just by flying over the prison, but it was thatâ€œ|they knew about him. Almost like they had been waiting for him.

He gulped again.

"They know about me." Hiccup whispered.

"What?" Alastair's voice hissed and he closed his eyes before continuing to speak. "What do you mean they know about you? Who's 'they'?"

"The dragons. They know I can hear their thoughts." Hiccup told the boy with wide eyes. "Like they were looking for me or something."

Hiccup sank more into the ground and let out a breath, opening his mind again to see if he could hear anymore of the conversation.

_:::The sun-haired one isn't who you are looking for::: _Toothless said promptly.

:::You know this?:::

:::Did the human try to contact you?:::

Both of the nightmares paused and glanced at each other before responding.

:::No.::: They both answered.

:::Do not start things so rashly.:::

:::You are not one to say.::: One of the nightmares almost laughed.

_:::As rash as you are.::: _The other added.

_:::Freedom is not rashness.::: _Toothless said, turning his nose away.

_:::You always have privileges.::: _One of the nightmares practically rolled it's eyes. _:::Just for being offspring to Nidhogg:::_

:::It's not my fault I'm offspring to Nidhogg. And it's mother's choice to treat me so specially.:::

:::Mother is mad that you're away.::

:::So be it. I stay for my own reasons.::

:::This village is dangerous with such powerful humans in it.::

:::Humans are no more dangerous than the trees in this forest.::
_Toothless snuffed.

:::The human who speaks our tongue is dangerous.::

:::You know the era has begun.:: The nightmare warned._ ::Any human with such power is dangerous.::_

_:::Please don't tell me what I think you areâ|.::: _Toothless asked, worried.

:::Be home soon. This village is too dangerous to be left standing.::
_One of the nightmares concluded, and they both spread their wings out and flew away. Toothless simply stared up at them and whipped out his tail from underneath him. The dragon had been cleverly hiding his tail the entire time, Hiccup realized. Obviously not wanting the others to know of his injury.

But then there was what that dragon had said before they leftâ|. .

...This village is too dangerous to be left standing.

"Hi-Hiccup," Hiccup heard Alastair's shaky voice penetrate his thoughts once more and looked over to see that Toothless had come behind the boulder to check on them, staring at Alastair with piercing eyes. "A little help hereâ|" he continued.

Hiccup stood in front of Alastair, feeling odd to take such a protective stance before a warrior. He looked at Toothless in worry.

_:::You heardâ|?::: _Toothless asked.

:::Yes. They'reâ|looking for me?:::

:::I'm afraid so. Your village is not safe as well.::

:::And who's this 'Nidhogg' that they were talking about? Does that have something to do with me too?:::

Toothless didn't respond, his mind was blank even as Hiccup searched it. Either the dragon's mind really was blankâ|"though he doubted itâ|"or he was able to hide his thoughts. Could He do that himself do that, Hiccup wondered?

Finally, Toothless simply looked down at Alastair, then back at Hiccup. _:::Take your friend back.::_ He ordered without answering the other question.

:::I will.:: Hiccup nodded, squeezing Alastair's shoulder without even realizing it. _:::But I'll be backâ|.Toothless:::_

...If you feel you must... was all Toothless said before turning to leave, but Hiccup could only smile at the fact that beneath Toothless's nonchalant words were a twinge of excitement mixed with curiosity.

Whatever it took. Hiccup would make it back to the cove to meet Toothless!

"What in the world was that?" Alastair asked, breaking his silent oath. "You just stare at the dragon and it leaves?"

"I wasn't staring. I was talking to him."

"Well what did you say to make him not kill me?"

"We weren't even talking about you." Hiccup rolled his eyes. "But I think I think Berk's in trouble."

"Is that what the other dragons were talking about?"

"More or less." Hiccup shook his head. "That and something named Nidhogg."

"Nidhogg?" Alastair repeated, twitching a brow. And then they locked gazes. Hiccup could see that Alastair was just as out of breath as he was, but he still smiled in spite of himself.

"Let's just get out of here." Alastair said quickly and stood, looking up at the wide expanse of rock leading upwards back into the forest. "It's gonna be a long climb."

0o0

As they walked Hiccup noticed Alastair's careful steps. Climbing up the side of the cove left the boy winded and even as he walked, he did so gingerly.

At that thought, Hiccup realized that Alastair had quite a bit of scratches on him, probably more in the week than most warriors earned in a month. All from babysitting him. He looked at the scratch on the boy's nose, wincing. It was small, alongside the still healing scratches on his shoulder, Hiccup suddenly felt oddly responsible.

"I was coming back to get you." Alastair suddenly broke the silence of the dawn trek back to the palace. "And that's when the dragons just attacked me while they were flying through the forest."

"They thought you were me." Hiccup explained. "That's why they took you to Toothless."

"This whole thing is just confusing and..." Alastair stopped, looking back at Hiccup with a curled eyebrow. "Toothless?" He almost laughed. "I'm pretty sure that dragon has teeth."

Hiccup smiled. "He retracts them" He opened his mouth, gesturing up and down with his hands.

"So you two really did speak to each other?" Alastair asked

quietly.

"Yes," Hiccup simply nodded and when Alastair continued to walk, he stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "Alastair." Hiccup started just as quietly. He wasn't all for these kinds of apologizes, but Alastair had been hurt because of him twice already, and was still willing to walk beside him.

"I'm sorry." Hiccup said in one breath. "It was wrong of me to bring up your cousin like that, I shouldn't have." Another breath. "You've been a great bodyguard so far and I should be more appreciative. Especially with all of thisâ€|dragon weirdness andâ€|"

It was when Hiccup saw a glisten in Alastair's eyes when he paused. At first, he'd mistaken it for the sun raising and hitting the dew sprinkled leaves of the forest, but the boy's eyes wouldn't have reflected anything if they weren't wet.

Alastair wasâ€|. crying? Because of him?

Hiccup felt as if someone had punched his stomach and almost stumbled back a bit, and when Alastair turned away hastilyâ€"his shoulder shaking in an attempt to compose himselfâ€"Hiccup wondered if that was what all warriors looked like when they were faced with something that broke their quota. Being strong and brave was all Hiccup knew for warriors to be, but this boyâ€|he was certainly something else. Perhaps he was just too young, or too inexperienced? Nonetheless, though, Hiccup had still made him cry.

How selfish, he thought.

It wasn't long before Hiccup stood beside Alastair again, standing somewhat awkwardly and not sure what to do. Hiccup was never too skilled in emotional mattersâ€"even the apology felt weird from his lipsâ€"but it was especially odd that he had to comfort another male, and a warrior at that. If Alastair was a girl, he would've just placed an arm around her and told her everything was going to be alright. That's what any Viking man would do with a crying woman. But what was he supposed to do with him?

Instead, he just placed a hand on one of Alastair's trembling shoulders, being careful to avoid his injured one, and offered him a small smile that he hoped to Thor was reassuring.

"I'mâ€|sorry." He said sincerely again. "I mean it."

"I know." Alastair told him in a broken breath, though Hiccup had already noticed his weak attempt to turn away from him so he wouldn't see the steady falling of his tears. It pained Hiccup to watch it.

"Your cousin would've been proud of you."

"Heâ€|wasn't my cousin." Alastair suddenly clenched underneath his hand, and Hiccup felt the boy coil, as if he had spoken forbidden words. Hiccup immediately let go, giving him some space.

"What?" Hiccup tried not to raise his voice.

"He was my brother." The boy told him in another breathless release

of words. But even in the small space between them, Hiccup felt a hinge on Alastair's words. Whatever was wrong with him, he didn't want to say what he was saying.

Stillâ€|"Your brother?" Hiccup's eyes widened. "Why on earth would lie to everyone like that?" He had faintly remembered hearing that Atlas had a sibling, but he remembered him mentioning just one sisterâ€|not a brother.

Alastair was silent for many long moments. Staring at the ground, crunching leaves underneath his boots and the wind slowly began to dry the tears as they fell.

"Alastairâ€|?" Hiccup pressed.

"I want to be like himâ€|even if I'm young. I want to be the same warrior he was." Alastair completely changed the subject, his voice lower than usual, as if he were trying to sound like an older man, and his eyes still locked on the leaves beneath his boots. "The kind of warrior that can even make a stubborn prince like you have some respect." There was a faint smile that escaped, even through his words. But it faded altogether. "Butâ€|That doesn't make me miss him any less." His shoulders began to quake again.

Hiccup eyes softened as he looked at the mess of warrior before him. It wasn't exactly his prideful goals and skill that impressed him at the moment, but his weakness. That he could be weak and a warrior filled him with some kind of relief. Hiccup walked back up to Alastair, placing a hand back on his shoulder. But this time, Alastair didn't try to cover his crying, the dead leaves under his feet were just constantly hit with teardrops. One by one.

"Poor boy," Hiccup whispered to himself and tightened his grip on Alastair's shoulder. Even though Hiccup didn't have any siblings he could understand Alastair's emotional breakdown.

"I'm sorry Prince Hiccup." Alastair sniffled a moment later, hastily drawing his hands up with wipe all the tears from his cheeks. "I apologize for being soâ€|"

"It's fine." Hiccup stopped him point blank, grabbing both his shoulders to hinder him. "Besides, you were coming back for me and got attacked by two nightmares, so I think we're even."

Alastair simply rolled his eyes, but even the small movement wiggled his nose, and he clenched his teeth in pain.

"And I suppose thisâ€|" he gestured towards his nose "â€"makes us even too?"

Hiccup leaned close, looking at his nose. He had gotten a worse scar before years ago from a dragon attack. And even though the boy had cried, he knew Alastair had a greater tolerance for pain than he did. Even in the scrap with the nightmares, he still didn't complain about the shoulder injury Toothless had given him.

Even as he looked at the boy's lightly freckled nose, he saw Alastair's eyes widened significantly, his breath hitched and a small tinge of red colored his skin. Hiccup immediately pulled away.

"What?" He asked.

"What?" Alastair's eyes still darted.

"You're all red. Did I do something wrong?"

"N-no." Alastair swallowed. "I just liked my space."

Hiccup could only concur with the boy on that matter of his personality. He never knew of someone who liked to be alone during personal activities more so than Alastair. He never bathed in the bathhouse, never changed in front of anyone, and never liked anyone to disturb his sleep, and always wore too much clothing even in the muggy humidity of the afternoons. The boy was quite odd if Hiccup was one to judge.

Alastair turned on his heel, wiping his face one last time.

"Still, I'm grateful for having you as a body guard." Hiccup thought it was good to add, just to lighten the situation.

"You're still my prince, and I'll protect you as it is my sworn duty to King Stoick." Alastair placed a hand to his own chest.

"Don't go reciting duties to me, I was just saying!"

"I know, Prince Hiccup, I know." Alastair smiled before suggesting. "Well, we should get back to the palace."

"So we can get yelled at by my father for being out all night," Hiccup added. "I guess you're right but we might as well walk back slowly. I'm in no rush to get in trouble."

0o0

Astrid wasn't shocked that Arte caught them as they tried to sneak in Hiccup's room unseen, she wasn't even shocked at the stern look King Stoick gave them as they entered the throne room. But what she was shocked about was that the King's look reminded her of her mother.

She had known this scenario too well by then. Sneaking off into the woods to practice with weapons, coming back with stains of her dress and scars on her knees, and of course her mother's stern look of disappointment in her unbecoming behavior.

Hiccup chewed his lip as he flicked his gaze up and down, as if he didn't know whether to try and float his way through the meeting or just to stay quiet. Astrid didn't feel the need for him to make that choice though. Judging by how Hiccup normally acted, standing in the throne room to be reprimanded was probably common state at that point. But now he was her responsibility.

She stepped in front of him, swallowing before she spoke.

"Permission to speak, My King?" Astrid said slowly.

Stoick stared her down a few more moments before speaking

himself.

"I find that my son and the warrior who's supposed to be protecting him have gone off and stayed in the woods all night. Two Monstrous Nightmares were spotted in those woods! What if he had been taken?"

"I'm terribly sorry, My King." Astrid got down on her knees, pressing her nose to the ground. "Staying out all night was wrong but I always have every interest of protecting your son no matter what happens."

"And your explanation?" Stoick pressed.

"Theâ€œ! " Astrid bit her tongue as the lies began to come from her mouth. "The Nightmares in the woods, they kept circling us on our way back hereâ€œ; we didn't want to lead them back to the palace, so we found a hallow tree to sleep in for the night." She swallowed again. Never would she have hoped to tell such a fluid lie to the Viking King, but what else was she supposed to say? _Sorry but I got mad at your son, he went to go talk to a Night Fury, and we lost track of time? _Such foolishness would get Hiccup sent to the Romans and Astrid back to Merkskof for sure. She kept her nose pressed to the ground despite the stinging from the small cut on it. She heard Hiccup's boot stop next to her.

"Alastair was nothing but the perfect warrior, Dad." He said. "And it was my idea to stay out so late." He looked to the side, sucking his teeth a little before uttering the last part. "I'm sorry too."

Stoick was silent for a long while, looking between the two.

"Go wait in the Historical Galley." Stoick told them. "I call for you when I figured out a punishment."

Astrid felt Hiccup's hand on her back and snapped up, stand quickly.

"Yes, King Stoick." Astrid dipped her head in another quick bow and left beside Hiccup.

0o0

"Great, first week here, and I'm already getting punished." Astrid began to twirl her hair nervously. Despite the fact that it wasn't the most manly of nervous habits, she was too agitated to stop. Hiccup merely sat on one of the many benches in the Historical Galley, looking up at the wall in front of himâ€œ; filled with a ongoing mural of all the Haddock family members and their history. Generations and generations of them. His eyes were intensely focused.

"You worry too much." Hiccup told her, though his eyes never left the wall. "I get in these sorts of situations all the time." His eyes had finally focused on one picture in particular and Astrid followed his gaze to one of the paintings.

"Who's that?" Astrid felt it right to ask. They had been stuck in the room for twenty minutes, so she might as well make small

conversation.

"I hate my name." Hiccup sighed, not even bothering to answer her question.

"Umâ€|why?" She asked, even though the conversation was already off on quite a random tangent.

"Look at the wall." He gestured towards it. "This wall has decades of Haddock family members and only two others on here are named Hiccup." His eyes squinted. "And they were both some of the biggest failures in the family lineage. Like a dark scar on the Haddock name."

"So then why would your father name you that?" Astrid wondered. She knew very little on past rulers let alone passed royal family members in general.

"It typically the name given to a runt. A small sickly baby that won't grow to be anymore thanâ€|" He looked down at himself.
"Wellâ€|me."

"Why are you being so hard on yourself?" Astrid sat next to him and placed a hand on his shoulder. In the back of her mind she wondered if that was the warrior-like thing to do, but Hiccup had done so early that morning in the forest. "That just means you have more to gain."

"There's never been a Hiccup as a ruler." He said. "Hiccup the first almost made it but was denied rights to the throne when he led the tribe to destruction."

"How?"

"As a prince he traveled the world to get away from everything, and when he came back he spoke of his travels and his vision to have peace between humans and dragons. He ended up bringing destruction to the tribe by trying to befriend a merciless dragon." He sighed. "And Hiccup the second was said to be so weak that dragons would simply follow him around just because he looked like an easy meal. So, his father ended up abandoning him on a mountain when he was nine to 'put him out of his misery'. Some say he went to go live with the mountain dragons and others say they just ate him. But whatever happened no one ever saw him again." Hiccup stood and walked towards Hiccup Haddock II's part on the mural. "I didn't matter, though, he was the youngest of three children so he wouldn't have taken the throne anyways. His older brother Thugheart did."

'That'sâ€|horrible." Astrid shook her head slightly, not knowing how to take it all in. Why on earth would King Stoick name his childâ€"and the future Kingâ€"such a cursed name? Did he want his son to fail so Snotlout could take the throne, or was it simply just because he was a runt? But it all made sense as to why he didn't want his father to send him away to the Roman lands. Why he felt he needed to prove himselfâ€|why it must've been so hard for him to not be able to kill that Night Fury.

"My name's a curse." Hiccup said quietly, his thoughts mirroring her own. "A Hiccup Haddock's curse to have their life run by dragons, and I fall right in line now." He hung his head.

"But think of all the good you can do with your power, you can avenge your own name." Astrid tried to persuade him, even if she didn't completely believe that herself. There was no denying that he had powers at that point. However it worked, Hiccup could hear what dragons were thinking. That was bound to be good for something.

"And how am I supposed to do that?"

"Well, Berk's in danger of another dragon attack, right? Astrid tried to muster up something.

"Yeah!"

"That's valuable information. Maybe you could tell King Stoick before it happens so we can have an effective attack strategy."

"No." Hiccup barked. "My dad will wonder how I know, and that won't end well." He breathed. "And I don't want there to be violence. It's not like knowing what something sounds like when it's dying. Dragon or not."

Astrid simply blinked at his response. She didn't know what to say to that. She was raised to hate dragons, her brother was killed by one, she became a warrior to kill dragons. But knowing Hiccup's power existed!

She closed her eyes slowly before opening them.

"I'll make some kind of deal with Toothless." Hiccup suddenly mentioned after minutes of cold silence.

"What's the Night Fury supposed to do? He's one of them."

"I don't know; he seems to have some kind of authority. So maybe something?"

"And what makes you think he'll help you?" Astrid crossed her arms.

More silence. Hiccup drummed his fingers on the mural wall before apparently getting an idea.

"His tail!" He exclaimed.

"What about it?" Astrid shrugged.

"Well what if I could exchange his help for his ability to fly again?"

Astrid almost spit in her laughing attempt. "How are you going to give it its ability to fly again?" Astrid asked. "And are you even sure that's the best idea? You'll pretty much be re-releasing a deadly Night Fury back into the skies."

"I'll think of something; but for now, that's gonna have to be it."

Astrid simply rolled her eyes, wondering how he could go from triggering her sympathy to making her annoyed at his wistful notions so easily.

Still, Astrid looked down at the end of the paintings, seeing depictions of King Stoick, Queen Valhallarama, and a younger Prince Hiccup. He looked so small compared to both of his parents. So weakâ€|a runt. It made her swallow and walk up to his side, trying her best to give him a supportive smile.

"Well, if that's what you want to do." She bowed in a jest "Warrior-in-training Alastair Hofferson at your service, My Prince."

She hoped that somewhat brightened the mood, and judging by the fact that he was smiling at her, she figured it did.

"Thank you, Alastair." He said sincerely.

Though of course he had to add.

"Though to be fair, you really don't have a choice."

She punched him in the shoulder.

"You had to ruin it, didn't you?"

0o0

Luckily her talk with Hiccup had calmed her nerves a bit when Stoick invited them back in the throne room, and she practically heard Hiccup's growl when Snotlout appeared to be in the room as well.

"So what's our punishment?" Hiccup asked, sounding bored with the whole ordeal at that point, and Astrid caught him and Snotlout glaring at each other constantly.

"I'm going to let you off with a warning, Alastair. You've protected my son so far this past week, but I won't have you recklessly abandoning your duties." Stoick sighed and Hiccup's eyes narrowed.

"You're leaving again, aren't you?" Hiccup stepped forward. "That's the only way I ever get off the hook."

"I'll be gone for three weeks at best." Stoick went up to Hiccup, placing a heavy hand on his son's shoulders, but Astrid could see practically a million emotions flicker over the prince's face. Relief, sadness, disappointment, ill-ease.

"Just try not to get into trouble, son." Stoick continued. "I'm serious. Don't give your cousin too much of a headache."

"Wait," Hiccup's disappointment rose to the forefront, then snapped into anger. "What?"

"I'm placing Snotlout in charge of while I'm gone."

"What do you mean? Spitelout always takes charge when you're gone."

"Snotlout needs to start taking on a few responsibilities as wellâ€|if he's going toâ€|." Stoick trailed off, but that didn't stop

the further disappointment from washing over Hiccup's face. Astrid knew that Snotlout was most likely to become King at that point, but even the King's words made her wince slightly.

"If he's going to what, Dad?" Hiccup barked.

"Watch your tone!" Stoick yelled back. "I've made my choice. Snotlout will be residing my duties while I'm gone and you're to stay out of trouble. Understood?"

"You don't think I can handle it, do you?" Hiccup asked instead.

"Understood?" Stoick pressed anyways. But Hiccup simply growled and stomped off.

"Fine, have a nice trip." He walked passed Astrid despite her attempts to say something to him.

"And no more late night prowls warrior Hofferson, don't make me regret putting my son in your care." Stoick told her, standing right before her. She gulped when she realizes he was casting a shadow over her as large as an eclipse. A bead of sweat ran down her forehead and she dipped in a quick bow before leaving.

Why did that chapter take so long? Maybe because I actually read it all the way through before posting it?

**Some more actual plot going on next chapterâ€|.and Snotlout's in charge. That's sure to be "fun". **

Review Responses:

LunnarChild: Gahz, I'm sorry. This chapter took so freaking long. Please don't hate me.

**Phenomenally Extraordinary: Thank you! I'm glad you liked the chapter. And yes, things will continue to be quite awkward for Astrid, especially since her and Hiccup are actually becoming friends now. And we'll definitely be seeing more of Toothless.
**

123456789: Thank you!

**Hazelnut: Thanks! And Toothless will have his innocent moments later on, he is a dragon who's been around for a while (though in dragons years I guess he's still a teenager?). For now he's very cautious in befriending Hiccup but as they become closer he'll be more loose as a character. **

Crazy nightfury lady: Thanks, I was hoping someone would catch how much depth went into the scene with Hiccup throwing his knife. That scene will actually be revisited later on. And yes, Astrid's bathhouse scene was something I've been eagerly waiting to write. It was pretty funny. As for Toothless, he sees Hiccup as more of a rare object right now, like you would protect a rare jewel if you found one. But that'll change eventuallyâ€|.

**Whitebengall14: I'm glad you liked the Hiccup/Toothless scene. It's something pretty cool to explore what would happen if they not only

had a great bond silently, but if they could read each other minds as well. Anyways, I'm glad it's off to a good start. And hopefully the conversation with the nightmares and Toothless was good as wellâ€|it has a lot of plotholes in it, though. But those will eventually be filled. Like Nidhoggâ€|.**

Lord Anubis Judge of the dead: Thank you! I put a lot of work into the overall development of the story, so I'm glad to see it's paying off!

**Guest: Sorry my updates have been kind of slow. I figured summer would be less busy for me. But that's proving to be not true.
**

Thank you for the continuing growth in reviews everyone! Keep em coming!

6. Measured and Challenged

Psh, and you thought this story was deadâ€|.

Okay, it was, but now it's back! Yay!?

For all three of you left, I can say I've been busy with HTTYD related things, if anyone follows me on tumblr you already know all the events and whatnot Berk's Grapevine has had to cover recently, as well as new episodes being out now. But still, you all care about the story and its back! So re-read, get caught up, and enjoyâ€"finallyâ€"a new chapter!

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Six: Measured and Challenged

It was an understatement to say that Hiccup spent most of the next week in the cove with Toothless.

In retrospect, Astrid could understand his longing to be as far away from Snotlout asserting himself as a mock-ruler while King Stoick was away. But at the same time, that meant that she had to stay in the cove as wellâ€|simply being a spectator to one of the oddest things she had ever seen in her life.

A Viking prince befriending a deadly night fury.

The two sat in silence for the most part. Hiccup would sit a respectable distance away from the dragon and the dragon would simply stare at him. Though apparently that was how they communicated.

She almost laughed at how easily Hiccup seemed to call the night fury "Toothless", for every time she saw him the dragon would bear his teeth at her on the spot. But, as long as he wasn't mauling her, she just sat and sharpened her axe while they talked for hours on end.

"Alastair." Hiccup walked up towards her. Toothless seemed to be near the lake, getting some fish, so it was a good time for Hiccup to check up on her, she figured.

"I'm fine." She answered before he asked her.

"How'sâ€|umâ€|Toothless?" She still couldn't help but feel weird calling a dragon that. "Any luck?" Despite the fact that she knew Hiccup would goof off more and simply talk endless chatter with the dragon, they were still there with a job to do. Make a deal with the dragon.

"I'm trying to find a good window to ask." Hiccup darted his eyes back and chewed his lip.

"This was _your_ idea, you know." Astrid ran a rock over her axe again.

"I know, I just don't want it to be odd." He looked over at Toothless for a quick moment before he stepped closer to Astrid, whispering.

"If I don't gain his trust first he'll never agree."

"And how much longer until all of this 'trust gaining' takes place?" Astrid gave another haphazard swipe of the rock she holding across her axe.

Hiccup frowned and looked over at Toothless, Astrid following his gaze. The dragon was nipping violently in the water, trying hard to get some fish, but seeming to only find luck in three. Astrid could see pure fascination blanket the Prince's features. He was enamored with the dragon to say the least.

"What are you doing here, Prince Hiccup?" Astrid asked him nonetheless. "You've got that look in your eyesâ€|"

Hiccup stood rigid for a moment, his hands balling into fists at his sides before shaking it off.

"If I can save my people, I'll do anything." Hiccup said in a whisper before meeting her eyes intently. "Isn't that what any Viking Prince would do?"

"Perhaps." Astrid shifted her weight towards him. "But is that what _you_ would do?"

He had nothing left to say before Toothless came up from behind him and sat too near Astrid for her comfort. The dragon licked away a fish tail dangling from his chops before retracting his teeth and staring at Hiccup.

And the two continued to 'talk'.

Astrid had noticed even in week Hiccup had been making frequent visits to the dragon, no contact was made. They sat a respectable distance away from each other. Hiccup had his space, and the dragon had his. Whatever relationship they had was slow, but slow wasn't getting the deal made any quicker.

It wasn't until the sun was setting when Hiccup made his way back over to Astrid, his gaze was glossed over and face fulfilled, and that look on his face made Astrid curl a slight smile despite the fact that she knew he hadn't made any sort of deal.

"We'll have to come back tomorrow." Hiccup announced, as he had every day when it was time to leave.

Astrid didn't bother arguing and just stood beside him. The grip on her axe had slackened over the week as well as she walked by Toothless. The first few days she had kept her axe up and ready the whole day, anticipating the dragon to snap at any moment. But now she supposed they had a cautious agreement.

She didn't have to like Toothless, she didn't have to talk to him, but she wouldn't kill him. And the dragon seemed to agree to those same terms.

Her reflexes kicked in, though, when suddenly she felt the dragon's warm body pressed on her back. She was squished into the ground next to Hiccup underneath the dragon. Grass slid between her teeth and dirt mixed with the spit that fell out of her mouth during the impact.

"Toothless!" Astrid coughed out, but the dragon just pushed down on them harder, as if trying to push them into the ground.

"Shush, Alastair." Hiccup told her quietly. "He's protecting us."

"From _what_?"

Her question was answered with a loud growl that came from above them. A dragon, no doubt flying over the cove. Relieved that it didn't stop, though knowing it would if it saw a night fury in the company of two humans, Toothless got off them when the coast was clear.

"Thank you, Toothless." Hiccup said outwardly, but his eyes shined brightly, and Astrid could tell they were communicating without words as well.

Astrid jabbed her shoulder into Hiccup's backside, shoving him into the dragon's apparently 'space'. "Ask now." She probed him harshly, not wanting to waste any more time with his days upon days of talking with the enemy.

Toothless, though, wasn't too pleased with Hiccup's sudden closeness and apparent nervousness had him quickly let down his teeth, growling and backing away after a few moments.

Hiccup let out a sigh and turned back to her.

"Like I said we have to come back tomorrow." He said more firmly that time.

"But I don't get-" she started.

"Come on." He grabbed her arm and pulled her towards the edge of the cove, turning back to give Toothless one last glance before looking up at the rocky cliff and began to climb it.

"I hope all this stalling is worth it, Prince Hiccup." Astrid told him. "Those dragons could be attack any day now and you're just having idle chit chat with the enemy."

Hiccup didn't offer her more than a simply scowl before

speaking.

"It's a very delicate process, Alastair. I don't expect you to understand but I do expect you to trust me."

"Delicate process?" Astrid crossed her arms, ignoring for the moment that he had thrown the heavy word of trust into the matter. She did trust him somewhat. But if anything the situation was still daunting enough.

"Toothless is a night fury, Alastair, it's a miracle he's even letting us be so close without killing us. A-and you saw how touchy he is about me getting to close to him. If I mention a deal to him too soon he'll doubt our friendship."

_Friendship? _Astrid's eyes twitched at the word of a Viking Prince and a night fury honestly being friends. But the hours and days they had spent speaking in the cove could convince anyone otherwise. Regardless of labels, there was some kind of bond going on there. One that would certainly be more fascinating if the good of their island wasn't in danger.

Her arms stayed crossed, but she stopped walking, looking at Hiccup carefully. His step was confident, his movements sure. Even if he didn't realize it or he didn't know what his next plan of action would be, his whole stature resonated with a sense of purpose. It was refreshing since all Astrid was used to feeling from him was a radiating self pity and failure.

She couldn't help but curl a slight smile on her lips and Hiccup twitched a brow.

"What?" He darted his eyes around.

"Nothing," Astrid continued to smile. "Just I do trust you, Prince Hiccup. At least, as much as I can trust a misfit prince I've known for just two weeks."

"Eh, I'll take it." He shrugged and continued to walk, a smile forming on him as well.

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"What would you like for dinner, Prince Haddock?" Arte asked as she dusted off the wooden and stone furnishings in his room, everything was silent besides the normal echoing hum of the wind hitting the stone walls. Hiccup sat at his desk, drawing secretly and making sure to not let Arte see what he was doing, glaring whenever she got too close.

Astrid lay out on the Prince's bed, kicking her foot up and simply staring at the cracks in the ceiling while she heard the constant scrap of Hiccup's charcoal on paper nearby. It was all melodic, lazy.a little too lazy.

"Oh, the usual." Hiccup waved a hand up, not particularly interested in what he was going to eat, apparently.

"Well geez, don't burden her down with details." Astrid hopped up from the bed and reached for her cape. "I need to stretch me legs

anyways, so I'll go get your dinner." Astrid said, looking over just once at Hiccup's annoyed face before going out the door. She knew that he hated to be alone with Arte, but she needed to do something instead of sit around all night.

The clang of her warrior's medal mixed with the clicking of her shoes was all Astrid heard as she walked down the mostly empty and fire lit hallways, the flickering glow of the torches almost lulling her into a trance as the halls seemed to go on forever until she finally bumped into another person.

In an embarrassing tumble and flow of cape and legs Astrid found herself looking up from the ground at another fellow warrior.

Hadisâ€"Hammerheadâ€"Yorger. Capable warrior due to the 6 medals that decorated his cape, a nickname that matched his all the more flat face, and an overall warrior's look. But still, he smiled at Astrid, blond locks falling into his eyes.

"Sorry about that." He laughed it off and offered a hand which Astrid took cautiously. "I guess we're both in a hurry to the meeting, huh?"

Astrid raised a brow. "Meeting?" she echoed in query.

Hadis matched her brow raise as well, "Yeah, there's a warrior's meeting in a few minutes in the throne room." He looked at her clothes as if to really make sure she was a warrior and Astrid suddenly felt extremely self conscious. Hopping her chest bindings were still tight enough. "Well, now that you mention it, I haven't really seen you around. Are you a new guy or something?"

"Umâ€|well, not exactly." Astrid stammered, almost slapping herself for being so nervous. "I've been placed as a protector to the Prince by King Stoick." She stood upright, trying to make her position of baby sitter sound a bit more bulky.

"Oh, you're the Prince's new caretaker, huh?" Hadis gave off a sly grin and Astrid wanted to punch his flat face in even more.

"I prefer protector." She turned her nose away. "I'm stationed in his room so I don't live in the warrior's quarters."

"That's too bad." Hadis began to walk away. "If they had just sent the little brat to Rome, you'd be with us like you're supposed to." He stopped suddenly, turning back to face her. "What's your name by the wayâ€|?"

"Alastairâ€|. Alastair Hofferson."

Hadis' eyes widened. "Hofferson? As in Atlas Hofferson?"

Astrid swallowed. Ever since she had told Hiccup that Atlas was really her brother, she wondered if she was over complicating things by making up an extra branch of the family to place herself in as it was. But it was no doubt all the warriors knew her brother wellâ€|and knew that he only spoke of a sisterâ€|never brother.

"I'm his cousin." She rested on regardless.

"Interestingâ€|. " Hadis walked back over to her and slapped her back, jerking her heavily forward. "Well, come on Hofferson, babysitter or not you've still got a medal, so you might as well come along."

Astrid stumbled forward as he lead her; she chewed her lip, looking back over her shoulder to the kitchen in the distance. What about Hiccup's dinner?

But it didn't seem like the older boy was paying much attention to her struggle and just kept guiding her forwards. Besides, if she was going to successfully live this lie, she had to be in the good favor of the other warriorsâ€|even Atlas's reputation still depended on how she carried out his name.

And not even Hiccup's obvious distaste for her association with them would get in the way or her keeping up her brother's good name.

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As Astrid entered the throne room with Hadis and saw Snotlout sitting where King Stoick usually sat she could feel Hiccup's figurative glare on her back. He would be pissed if he knew she was thereâ€|. especially when she was originally sent to get his dinner.

"Who's the small fry?" Another warrior asked when Hadis came up to them, Astrid a short distance behind.

"Atlas's cousin, he's the one who's babysitting the prince." Hadis explained, much to Astrid's disgust.

"Protecting," Astrid emphasized, though that didn't stifle any of the warrior's cackles.

The meeting was rather dullâ€|

As Snotlout rambled on, slightly inexperienced in his running things but still handling himself with as much cover up as he seemed to always do. His cockiness overrode his probable instincts to screw up at the moment, and Astrid knew half of that cocky high came from the fact that he was up there instead of the true blooded prince.

She didn't laugh or smile in her thoughts of Hiccup being up there giving orders instead, for, as it was, she could barely picture it. Hiccup was improving with his purpose in life, yes, but she hardly saw him as a ruler, especially to a Viking kingdom. Perhaps one day he'd grow into the roleâ€|? Besides he was only 14 to Snotlout's 17 years, but in a year Snotlout would technically be old enough to take the throneâ€|. and if Hiccup didn't step up and give his father a reason to hold off for himâ€|he could kiss his blood rights goodbye.

The meeting ended in the same blur it began in. Astrid was far too lost in her thoughts to really pay attention to what Snotlout was briefing them on. Not that it really mattered to her. She was just going to stand by and protect the prince either way.

"Where's your baby?" Snotlout teased, slapping her shoulder lightly as he walked over to her, a confident jaunt in his step from delivering a half way decent first warrior's briefing.

"Haha," Astrid rolled her eyes. "Prince Hiccup's in his room working on something."

"More ways to screw over the Kingdom, I'm sure."

"He doesn't 'screw over the kingdom', Snotlout." Astrid defended. The Warrior Duke's words seemed to slice something within her as well. All she could remember was Hiccup's pitied confession of his former namesake's, all bringing dishonor to their name and family linage due to dragons. "Andâ€œ" she continued. "â€œI prefer to show all due respect to the prince and future king."

"Ha! You're looking at the future king, Alastair." Snotlout said, his last words lingering darkness over her head. She could see the willingness to charge behind his eyes, sparks of fury and light bursting behind them. But she stood her ground, only to realize that the anger wasn't directed towards her anymore.

Following Snotlout's line of sight and turning around she saw Hiccup standing behind her. There was an unreadable expression painted on his features and she couldn't tell if he was smug or disappointed. It depended on how much of the conversation he heard.

Hiccup didn't look at her, his eyes just stayed glued on Snotlout, and all out war seemingly going on in their eye contact and standing in the middle of it was almost unsettling if not a little exciting.

"Don't you even think for a second that you can do this job better than me." Snotlout said, the words having a sense of history behind them that Astrid knew she couldn't follow.

"I'll do what I was born to do, Snotlout, not what was carelessly and uncertainly handed over to me." Hiccup bit back, an icy glare between his tightly squinted eye lids before he turnedâ€œ|done with the conversation.

Astrid blindingly followed after Hiccup, knowing that she seemed like she was on his leash at the moment, but not particularly caring even as she got stares from the silent warriors, all of them having listened to the Prince and Warrior Duke's conversation.

She twisted her fingers together as she followed Hiccup down another long, fire lit hallway. She couldn't tell if they were heading back to his room or to the kitchen to get his dinner which she had long sense abandoned her duty to getâ€œ|.

Speaking of whichâ€œ|.

"I-I'm sorry Prince Hiccup, I should've brought your dinner first-"

"I thought you'd be in there." He told her, rather softlyâ€œ" "At the meeting."â€œ"rather coldly.

"I said I was sorry I didn't get your dinner, okay. Hadis just pulled

me into the meeting and I've got to be a in good place with these people or else I'm never gonna pass off as a-"

She stopped herself.

Thank Odin she stopped herself.

Luckily Hiccup was too lost in being distant to notice her cut rant. Or at least, so Astrid thought. She was more than prepared for them to have an argument but instead he said something different all together.

"Thank you, Alastair." He turned towards her, doing his best to hide a small smile.

Astrid's eyes widened and she blinked.

"For sticking up for me. I know it's hard for you to be stuck with me all the time and Iâ€|.justâ€|thank you, okay?" He turned his back to her. He had apparently said what he needed to say, and for the person Astrid had known him to be, saying so was probably pretty hard for him. It would've been so easy to start an argument, but instead he just said thank youâ€|.

She couldn't help but smile. He was learningâ€|.

"Well someone ought to tell that jerk he's wrong about you." Astrid began to walk, and Hiccup fell in stride beside her, still smiling.

Even if Astrid couldn't fully wrap her mind around Hiccup in a King's position, she'd much rather taste the name of 'King Hiccup' on her lips than 'King Snotlout'. And, of course, she got a motherly sense of endearment towards the Prince, almost. The way he smiled all the way to the kitchen to retrieve his dinner, the relief that washed over him when she saw the realization wash over him.

That Astridâ€"that _someone_â€"had actually stood up for him.

Simply because she wanted to.

She had the pride of her brother to protect, that much was certain. But she knew that she'd be protecting what he believed in more by being there for Hiccup rather than trying to fit in with the warriors.

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Nothing was going at the pace Alastair expected, and Hiccup knew the boy grew impatient. But there was something sacred about being in Toothless's presence. It required respect, patience, and knowing when to back off and when to lunge forward.

Hiccup's meetings with Toothless had been long in time span yet slow in the overall scheme of things. He often had to remind himself that he had a main objective to begin with: make a deal with the dragon to protect Berk.

The ultimate plan to get him back in the good graces of his people.

If Hiccup was able to pull off befriended a dragon properly and saving the island he'd rid himself of his namesake curse and be next in line for King for sure instead ofâ€|. Snotlout.

Just the name made him scowl. Alastair has long sense gone to bed after attending the warrior's meeting and while Hiccup had been livid as he had walked down the hallway in search for his own dinner and his bodyguard, once he heard Alastair standing up for him in front of all the other warriors he couldn't help but feelâ€|. good.

It was nice that Alastair was turning out to be exactly what he needed. And certainly if it wasn't for the boy Hiccup would've been on the next boat to Rome weeks ago.

Arte had left to her quarters for the night and Hiccup was left awake in the late hours of the night, simply staring at the ceiling and compiling different ideas in his head.

He knew that once he got Toothless's trust he'd have to have a convincing argument as to why the night fury would team up with him past their 'friendship'.

He had spent many nights trying to figure out a way to give a flightless dragon flight and he finally felt he hit a golden plan. Or at least the start of one.

He hopped up from the bed and sketched down a few of his final ideas before finally blowing out the last candleâ€|. only to see Alastair opening the door. Cape, gloves, and boots in place, and looking well rested.

"Good morning, Prince Hiccup." He greeted.

Hiccup blinked blankly. "What?" he asked. He couldn't have stayed away all nightâ€|could he?

"I said 'good morning'." Alastair reiterated, giving him a slight look before circling him. "Bags under your eyes, unkempt hair, the same clothes I saw you in last nightâ€"" he sniffed the air near him "â€"and you still smell like last night's fish dinnerâ€|. you didn't go to sleep at all, did you?"

Hiccup yawned, not in the mood for Alastair mothering. "Looks like it."

"Prince Hiccupâ€| ."

"I know I should've slept but I got a perfect idea to wager with Toothless." That switched Alastair's mood, and Hiccup smiled.

"Let's hear it," Alastair took a seat on the bed while Hiccup walked over to retrieve his notes and sketches. He sprawled them out on the bed rather messily, seeming to get some kind of high off of simply explaining his work to someone.

"Okayâ€|what ifâ€|.what if I gave Toothless a tail fin kind of device where the missing one is supposed to be?"

"This is your grand idea?" Alastair responded tautly, and Hiccup's

high immediately faded. "Give the dragon it's missing appendage back?"

"Yeah," Hiccup sucked his teeth, a challenge in his eyes. "You got something better?"

"Oh no, don't let me stop you. But how are you going to know what's the right size if Toothless won't let you anywhere near enough?" Hiccup was silent. He hated when Alastair was right about his rather brash yet brilliant decisions. Toothless and him were still in the 'keep a fair distance stage' and he certainly wouldn't let him anywhere near his severed tail.

But stillâ€|. .

"We're just gonna have to play it by ear right nowâ€|" Hiccup knew Alastair hated half baked plans, but that was all he could think of, and Alastair refused to think of it.

He caught Alastair's eye roll.

"We should leave nowâ€|. it might take a whileâ€|" Hiccup took a comb off his dresser and ran it through his hair a few times before putting on his boots and gesturing towards the door.

"You're not gonna bathe first?" Alastair asked. "Smelling like last night's fish probably isn't the best scent to have when visiting a dragon."

Hiccup gave himself a good whiff before wrinkling his nose.

"Nah, I'll just get sweaty walking there and back. Besides, if Toothless was going to eat me, he would've done so already."

Alastair shook his head with a smile as he walked over towards the door with Hiccup. "If you say so, my Princeâ€|."

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Another oddly humid day wasn't the best weather for hiking and by the time Hiccup had got to the cove he was sure he smelled of a lot more than last night's fish.

Toothless was napping quietly in the cove and didn't seem to stir even as they came down into the cove, making plenty of noise to wake a sensitive night fury. But oddly enough, he still slept.

"You think he's sick?" Alastair asked.

"Maybeâ€|.." Hiccup felt odd when he got no words coming from Toothless. Perhaps when dragon's slept they didn't dream like humans did? And Hiccup couldn't say he wasn't slightly disappointed. While he would've liked to find Toothless awake, hearing what night fury dreamed about would be rather exciting.

He walked towards Toothless slowly, noticing that Alastair had regained his short distance, axe still tight in hand.

Hiccup didn't know whether to reach forward or use Toothless's

sleeping to his advantage. He looked back at Alastair, the boy's eyes serious.

"Don't wake him up," Alastair hissed. "You're more likely to be able to measure the tail when he's asleep."

Hiccup simply nodded, taking the measuring line out of his pocket and walking ever so slowly towards Toothless. He kept his mind open, and was simply awed at the fact that Toothless's mind wasn't active, he didn't stir, only a coursing breath that let Hiccup know he was still alive.

"Slowlyâ€|" Hiccup told himself and leaned down next to Toothless's tail. The side that was still there had many notches in it. In fact, now that Hiccup was up close he could see many scars and on the night fury's body, a history and a specific pain emitting from each one almost in waves. He was urged to reach out and touch one, wistfully hoping one touch would just make them go away but he held back and looked back down at the tail fin. He laid the measuring line down in the grass, trying to outline the tail as best he could.

But he made the mistake of brushing his hand up against Toothless's tail, and almost in a snapping jolt within him, his brain exploded with the quick reflex of Toothless.

The dragon snapped. Toothless jolted upwards and turned in quick wind to tail and wings, facing Hiccup dead in the eyes, a growl in his breath and his teeth down.

_:::You were awakeâ€|.weren't you?::: _Hiccup felt it right to ask

_:::Why are you so near me? Why is the length of my tail so important?::: _Toothless obviously wasn't in the mood for Hiccup's usually witty explanations and he gulped. He knew he should've tried to wake him first. And of course, as he hadn't been able to hear any of Toothless's thoughtsâ€|.Toothless could obviously hear his.

_:::Iâ€|.I have a dealâ€|I want to make with you.::: _Hiccup said, wincing all the way, though. He knew how Toothless would react to that.

_:::All of this was a trick to make a deal with me!?::_The dragon turned away, now facing Alastair and by the frightened look on the boy's face he knew that he was more than likely giving him a threatening look.

Stupidly he reached out for Toothless, but the dragon turned back to face him, that same danger in his eyes.

Hiccup tried to open up more, but Toothless was closing off his mind more and more. Still, what was evident was the forced fear he emitted. Every ounce of his actions was being overrode and corrupted by it.

_:::It wasn't a trick!::: _Hiccup made clear. _:::I'm your friend.:::_

:::Such companionship is not a deal.:::

_::Well maybe if you'd just hear me out you'd understand!:: _Hiccup pleaded, but Toothless turned away again.

::Toothless!::

::Leave.::

::No!::

::LEAVE!::

Hiccup didn't comprehend much but before he knew it he was tackled to the ground, the wind knocked out of him, and staring dead the face of a frightened dragon, masked with an air of threats and power.

His claws dug into Hiccup chest; he knew they'd be at least a redness there, but he tried to not show it on his face, attempting to match Toothless's eyes.

Alastair came forward, his grip on his axe tight and with every intention to charge when needed.

"Let him go." Alastair said, though Hiccup knew Toothless wouldn't understand. He was, though, impressed that the boy didn't just charge right at him from the get go. "Hiccupâ€|.?"

_::We'll leaveâ€|.:: _Hiccup finally sighed. _::Just spare my life.:: _Hiccup threw in, even though he could already tell the dragon's intent was never to kill him, or even to hurt him.

The claws came off his chest and Alastair immediately pulled Hiccup up and away, checking him.

"Are you alright, Hiccup?" He asked, a light squeak in his voice that always occurred when he was distressed.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fineâ€|" His eyes locked with Toothless's, who was standing at attention, watching them both closely with an unreadable look in eyesâ€|even for him.

One question was easy to decipher from Toothless, though, as Hiccup lead Alastair out of the coveâ€|

::Can he be trustedâ€|.?:

0o0

"'Oh, don't wake him up, Prince Hiccupâ€|you're more likely to get the measurements when he's asleep, Prince Hiccup!'" Hiccup mocked Alastair as they walked back through the forest.

"Okay, so I misjudged the events. But, I'm not the one who can hear dragon's thoughtsâ€|.couldn't you have sensed if he was really asleep or not?" Alastair crossed his arms, pouting.

"I thought so, but for some reason Toothless can hide his thoughts from me sometimesâ€|.."

"And you can't?"

"Not that I know ofâ€|. " Hiccup let out a groan, throwing his head up and ran his hands over his face. The tension hurt his chest a bit where Toothless had dug his claws, but he was too frustrated to care. "I wish I had someone to practice on!"

"Well it's not like there's another dragon out here you can befriendâ€|. " Alastair still had his arms crossed, deep in thought.

"Or another humanâ€|. " Hiccup smiled, looking over at Alastair as his mind began reeling. He had tried the first week after he discovered his ability to read the minds of the people in the palaceâ€|but maybe he just wasn't trying hard enough? And since Alastair was more or less his friend, that might help.

"No, no, no! Absolutely not!" Alastair said firmly.

"Come on, Alastair! I need to at least practice on you. "

"I-I don't want you rooting around in my thoughts. "

Hiccup smirked. "And what makes you think just because you don't want to that it really matters?" He challenged. "I can read your mind whether you want me to or not." Of course he was exaggerating, as he didn't know if he could read human minds, but if he wanted to get Alastair to help him out he'd have to manipulate a little.

Besides, he still got chills from the dragon's conversation he overheard the previous week. How they all knew of him, his abilities, that mysterious Nidhogg they mentioned that Toothless closed off his mind when questioned on it.

He needed practice, that was for sure.

Luckily, Alastair let out a sigh, frowning. "Whatever, " he said, "let's just get it over with. "

"Not nowâ€|" Hiccup shushed him, a thought suddenly overcoming him as he recognized the area they had wandered into. He looked up, seeing the tree he had found Toothless in, the bola and strings still there and everythingâ€| .

And if they were thereâ€| .

He ran over to the tree, looking down to the ground and moving a few dead leaves from the ground before he found what he was looking for, smiling.

"What is it?" Alastair asked, hovering over him, but Hiccup didn't answer. He just continued to smile.

Toothless's tail fin was still there. Bugs and other little things were stuck to it, eating it up. Dried blood still stained the ground, and the smell was probably worse than Hiccup at that point. But it was what Hiccup needed to measure, and if he couldn't measure Toothless's attached tail fin, why not measure the torn off one?

"That's still here!?" Alastair reared away, wrinkling his nose.

"Yep," Hiccup still smiled and he could feel Alastair's eyes on his back.

"And you're going to measure that aren't you?" Alastair asked.

"Yep."

"So I'm just assuming you're going to completely ignore the fact that Toothless made it obvious he didn't want you anywhere near him or his tail."

Hiccup rolled his eyes. He swore Alastair was more a mother sometimes. He pulled into his chest pocket taking out his sketch book and charcoal stick and throwing it over the Alastair. He didn't even have to look to know he caught it.

"Take notes." He ordered as he took out his measuring line. "I'm going to be talking quickly before the smell of this thing makes me pass out."

0o0

The measurements were made and recorded and Astrid spent most of the walk back flipping through Hiccup's sketchbook.

It had a little bit of everything in there, notes, stories, thoughts, drawings. She couldn't help but smile as she looked through it. The prince was truly a talented boyâ€¦but it just wasn't the talents she'd expect from a Viking Prince. He had been born in the wrong culture, that was for sure. He probably would've done just fine being shipped off to Rome, all those heady scholars and philosophers. But then, of course, he'd just be running away from what he was born into. And Astrid truly admired his drive to stay.

And then there was the whole situation with Toothlessâ€¦while odd, what seemed to be dominating her mind at the moment was how frightening it was that Hiccup could potentially read her thoughts! The last thing she wanted was to have to hide the fact that she was a girl in her own thoughts as well. Especially from Hiccup.

The thought had run through her mind a few times to just tell him the truth, but there was a level of respect he had for her as Alastair. And after how she saw him treat Ash Eyes, well, she felt more comfortable as his male body guard.

Once in his room, Hiccup set everything down and called for Arte to pick up both their dinners, and impressively he knew exactly what she wanted to eat.

"Okay, so we have the measurements, you sketched everything out last nightâ€¦now what?"

"We make the tail." Hiccup turned and smiled at her and turned to face a lone wooden door between his bed and sketch table.

The door was such a subtle touch to room, Astrid had barely noticed it. She figured it was a leisure room, but as he opened it she stepped into a box of heat. A furnace was to her right while a coal

stack stood in the center. Tables filled with metalwork and protective gear. She blinked.

"You have a forge in your room!?"

"Umâ€|yeah." Hiccup shrugged. Only a prince could think having a blacksmith's forge in his room wasn't odd.

"Butâ€|.how!?. I don't-"

"When I was 10 my father made me go work for the island's blacksmith, I guess he felt if I couldn't rule the kingdom, I might as well not be completely uselessâ€|." He faded away for a minute in his words, and Astrid could see that dejected look stomping down on his newfound confidence. Quickly she reached out and gave his back a light pat, and the small gesture seemed to snap him out of it.

"Once my apprenticeship ended I started getting into trouble again, I guess, soâ€|.he built me a smithy in here to keep me occupied." He looked up at her, giving her the best forced smile she had ever seen, and it made her chest tight. "My father will build me anything if it keeps me in this room."

Astrid's chest tightened again. She looked outside the threshold of the door back into his room. It was a large room, filled with dressers, a drawing table, models and creations decorated everything, enough books to make any Viking's head spin, and now a forgery! Like Hiccup said, 'anything to keep him inside that room'. Such a beautiful room yet it felt so empty. It was stone, carved, cold, no windows. It was a prison. A beautiful prison.

She took his sketchbook that she still held and shoved it against his chest, matching his wince when she forgot Toothless had dug his claws there. Hiccup grabbed the book still, and smiled.

"Let's just get started so you're not up all night again."

Their eyes locked for a moment, and Astrid fingers tightened around the book she held against him.

"Um, excuse me, Prince Hiccup." Arte's voice broke the silence and Astrid immediately sprang from her position, and the sketchbook fell to the floor.

"What is it Arte? Alastair and I are about to start on an important project."

"My apologizes, My Prince," Arte bowed. "But the dinner deliveries have been halted by your cousin."

Astrid saw Hiccup's eyes narrow.

"You'll have to eat in the dining hall." Arte elaborated.

Hiccup rolled his eyes, not even hiding his frustration.

"Come on, Alastair." Hiccup said with a sigh in his every breath. "Let's just go get dinner first."

"A-are you sure?" Astrid asked, her voice a little more timid than

she would've like to sound, and Hiccup turned, giving her an icy look that made her breath hitch.

"I said come on." And with that he walked out, shoving past Arte and heading for the door of his room. Arte stood with a small look of amusement on her face before turning to Astrid for a reaction, but she didn't give the maid the satisfaction

There was nothing amusing about how Hiccup felt about his cousin.

0o0

All the dinner was being re-routed to the King's Dining Hall, apparently. Snotlout seemed to enjoy milking the perks of being in charge and was hosting a dinner party for the palace's residents. All the warriors were there, the officials, maids, servants, everyone had probably known beforehand.

All but the Prince.

Astrid could actually feel the contempt coming off of Hiccup as they entered the room, a large buffet of all the dinner prepared that night rounding the table.

"Oh hey, look who decided to join the party!" Snotlout yelled in a drunk slur from the front end of the table. "The useless prince and his little girlfriend!"

Astrid twitched a little. Not at the fact that she could hear Hiccup's growl even in the loud dining room, but also because of the fact that Snotlout had just called her Hiccup's 'little girlfriend'. Obviously it was a jesting quip, but the gender accuracy seemed to burn her a bit. Despite her being aware that after her bout with Snotlout at the warrior's meeting the previous night she still followed blindingly behind Hiccup. Picking up a few things on her plate before she turned back to him.

"We should just go back to my room, I don't really want to eat in here."

"Heeeeey, there cousin!" Snotlout suddenly appeared beside Hiccup, locking an arm around his neck and a mug of mead in the other. "Why don't you and your girlfriend stay a while!?"

Hiccup glowered at him.

"And while you're at it take a shower. You smell like fish!"

Hiccup snaked out of Snotlout's grasp but didn't make a big enough gap between them as he glared heavily. There was a fire burning in his eyes and Astrid grabbed his arm, pulling him away.

"Prince Hiccup, you said we should goâ€|. "

Snotlout took another swig of his mug, only to frown when he realized the mug was empty, and turned his attention back to Hiccup, smirking a little as he threw his mug over his shoulder.

"Listen to your mommy Hiccup." Snotlout laughed, and Astrid twitched

again at how she had gone from 'girlfriend' to 'mommy'. "You couldn't fit in here anyways. Only respected members of the palace are allowed here."

Astrid could almost hear Hiccup's patience snap as he dropped his plate of food, the dainty pickings falling casually to the ground as the Prince lunged forward towards the Warrior Duke.

At a first glance if she hadn't known him, Astrid would've found the fight humorous. A skinny boy throwing flimsy punches and slaps at a boy twice his body mass while he just laughed in a drunk pant. Everyone else laughed, of course, but not Astrid. She stood wide eyed for a moment as she watched Hiccup do everything he could to defend what little pride and honor he had and wanted to protect, but it was no use. He was destined to look like a fool and that's what made Astrid dive in. It was too painful to watch.

She hooked her arms around his elbows and pulled him up, but Hiccup continued to kick and punch; like a little child. His face was red from embarrassment and his breath was heavy.

"Let go of me, Alastair!"

"That's enough, Prince Hiccup!" Astrid didn't let go despite his squirming.

Snotlout stood, brushing himself off and walking up to them. Astrid let go of Hiccup and immediately put herself between the two, blocking Hiccup from lunging forwards and Snotlout from perhaps returning the fight. She took a good look at the Warrior Duke before he spoke, his cheek was bruised a bit and she smiled. At least Hiccup had landed one good blow.

"Out of the way, princess." Snotlout growled at her, his drunk bouts seeming to bubble away from the heat of his anger. "What would your cousin think if he knew you were getting in the way of royal matters?"

"This stupid fight is not a royal matter." She countered heavily, squirming to keep Hiccup at bay. "Prince Hiccup doesn't have to prove himself to the likes of you!"

"I think 'Prince Hiccup' can speak for himself!" Snotlout looked over Astrid's shoulder at Hiccup, still glaring and fidgeting in an attempt to get at Snotlout. "Or is he too busy suckling?"

"That tears it!" Hiccup growled and shoved Astrid aside in an impressive bout of strength. Astrid made a step to retrieve him but stopped herself when she saw he wasn't going in for a punch. He went straight up to Snotlout, his small frame and height being shadowed but he still stood his ground. "You don't think I'm a man? I'll prove it!"

Snotlout let out a beefy laugh, the room joining him. "Oh really?" He raised a brow as he smirked.

"Yeah, really."

"Well if it's a fist fight you're looking for, I'll be happy to knock you teeth out when and where ever."

"Psh, fist fighting is for children, I talking about a real test of manhood." Hiccup looked over at the walls, and Astrid followed his vision. It was filled with axes, shields andâ€|. .

"Oh noâ€|. " Astrid muttered.

"A sword fight, a week from today in the warrior's court yard."

Another laugh. "You just love to embarrass yourself don't you?" Snotlout picked but Hiccup only gave a tough glare as a reply.

"I'll be waiting in the court yard a week from today if your man enough to fight me." And with that Hiccup turned away, walking out of the room.

He passed by Astrid and gave her an upward glance, one that she swore a million emotions flashed through in the few seconds they had eye contact. But one she caught clearly was the desperate look in his eyes for her to follow him out of the room.

She gave the then dead silent room a good glare herself before walking up beside Hiccup to exit the room side by side.

He had looked stupid that night. Irrational, weak, and foolishly cocky all at once to protect his pride. But he was her Prince and more importantly he was her friend.

So they'd look stupid together.

**This chapter has changed so much since I first planned it! So many things got added, and so many things got pushed into the next chapter because this one was getting a little too long. Such as making the tail and Toothless's reaction to said tail since him and Hiccup are at a little bit of odds right now. **

But, that's all in the next chapter. And, of course, Hiccup's gotta duel Snotlout. That's sure to be interesting, but that'll be a smidge later. Hiccup, Astrid, and Toothless have work to do until then!

And again, I do plan to update this next chapter quicker than the last one. I'm just so sorry it took so long. But if any of you followed my Avatar storiesâ€|. taking really long hiatuses and then coming back better than ever is kind of my thingâ€|..*goes in a corner*

**And since reviews were forever ago but I'll still respond (I wonder how many are back to read them?) **

Phenomenally Extraordinary: Snotlout's definitely more about the perks than ruling, but luckily nothing too hectic is going on while Stoick is away, he will eventually get a sense that it's more than just telling people what to do, though. But it's going to be fun to mess with Snotlout's character, especially with a duel coming up. And yeah, I thought adding Hiccup's name and the past Hiccup Haddock's fit into the story rather nicely!

**Fjord Mustang: Sorry I haven't been writing for a while, I've been

playing running a fansite catch-up XD And thank you! I am trying to give the dragons a different air to them even though their words are written in the same language as the humans, but I'm glad the difference is coming through to readers, especially for Toothless, I like to make him different from the other dragons, yet still different from Hiccup. Though as Hiccup and Toothless get closer some gradual changes will occur. **

**And yeah, Hiccup is definitely learning. Dealing with people in a friendly way in general is rather foreign to him, and everything he encounters with both Toothless and "Alastair" are pretty experimental for him. But this chapter was definitely a turning point for Hiccup and Astrid's friendship, and of course their relationship moves at a different pace and direction than Hiccup and Toothless. **

And thanks! My goal for this story isn't really to have too many obvious fanservice moments, a bath house scene is expected as it's bound to happen, but how it's handled is a different story. Astrid was bound to feel nervous about seeing Hiccup or any other guy naked, but I didn't really feel like having her suddenly lust behind Hiccup was necessary, but thank you for appreciating my handling of that scene.

Blazelight790: Thank you, I'm just so sorry this chapter took forever to update. And I'm basing Astrid's being a boy off of one of my favorite book series "Leviathan" by Scott Westerfeld. So if you've read that, then that's probably it. And there are plenty of other stories and movies with similar plots. It's just something fun to play with in Astrid character, and fits into the time period rather well. And I really don't want to reveal too much about the when and how of Hiccup finding out Astrid is a girl, obviously this has to happen, but the plot backing it up and the consequences aren't what people think it's gonna be|.trust me XD

LunnarChild: Thank you, I'm trying to keep them coming!

crazy nightfury lady: Thank you! And, yes, having Astrid figure out does pose a lot of differences for the overall feel, but it dampens it because up until that point Astrid and Hiccup had never met, nor are they a love interest to each other. Hiccup's friendship with "Alastair" is just as new as with Toothless so it's all an experiment. But, everyone seemed to like the addition of the other Hiccup's into the story, plus it gives it that "book-verse" feeling.

**Eyriegirl: Thank you! I hope it's off to a good comeback now.
**

SAmaster01: Thank you! I know it took forever for the next chapter, but hopefully it was somewhat worth the wait. And hmm, more imagery? I've gotten comments that this story is extremely descriptive, but I could try and to incorporate more imagery for the palace!

**And thanks! I think it's good that I've seemed to accomplish putting the characters in a new situation that causes for different actions|.yet still in character. And now 'bad writing' pitfalls is good as well! And I don't want to reveal too much about Astrid's reveal, obviously it has to happen, but it won't be too soon, I can tell you that. The plot right now isn't focusing on Astrid revealing herself. The thought will always be on her mind, but when it does

come outâ€|. it's going to play a HUGE role in the plot for the rest of the story, and definitely not in the way people think. And Hiccup's dagger will show up again, don't worry XD**

Guest 1: I did write more! I hope you like it, I'm just sorry it took so longâ€|

Guest 2: Thank you! And I know, it has been a whileâ€|.

Hrh: Thank you! And it's finally updated! I hope you enjoy!

2400shadow: Yeah, Hiccup's got quite a few things to deal with after this chapter, he truly doesn't get a break. And Snotlout's step-in as King has only begun!

Prayergirl: Thank you! I do get people telling me they're really long, though, at least they're not too short!

Ferdoos: Thank you! And the next update's finally here!

Thanks everyone for reviewing chapter 5! Chapter 7 will be up sooner than last time!

Up Next: Tested and Dueled, Part 1

7. Tested and Dueled, Part 1

**And out from the ashes, this story re-appears. **

So, here's the thing. I take this story pretty darn seriously, so I take tons of time (probably too much time) on each chapter. But, as I'm sure you all hate the horribly long breaks between chapters I don't like them that much either. So, I was working on completing **_all **_**of part one and then updating each chapter every other week while I worked on part two and so onâ€|so I didn't get so behind again. Which, that plan is actually working out pretty well. Part one is looking good now that I'm on that writing schedule. **

Only drawback is you guys would've had to wait for me to complete **_all **_**of part one before reading another chapter and half of my inbox on tumblr (literally) was "when's the next chapter gonna be updated?" soâ€|here's chapter 7. There will probably be another long wait for the next chapter but when there's another update **_**then **_**my new updating schedule will commence and there won't be such a long wait in between chapters anymore. **

Soâ€|just hold out for one more mysteriously long waiting period. But here's chapter 7 for your patience (it's been done for a while).

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Seven: Tested and Dueled, Part One

It was a long night of silence and work. Alastair stayed beside him even though Hiccup could see the tired shadows under his eyes. The forge was hot and with the extra muggy air outside it made the environment rather uncomfortable, but Hiccup sweated it out.

He attached the screws to make the metal skeleton while Alastair sat down, carefully sewing together the leather coverings. Hiccup was rather shocked when Alastair claimed to know sewing. The boy seemed terrified, or perhaps ashamed of the ability, but Hiccup paid no heed. Although he too was good at sewing it was only for blacksmithing purposes, and Alastair's hands were definitely more daintily qualified for the matter.

He stared for a moment at Alastair's small hands working the needle before looking back at his own metal work. Would this work, he wondered?

Countless times he had gone over the mechanics in his mind as he thought up what seemed like the perfect plan earlier that morning. But just like all of Hiccup's other impulses he was starting to have second thoughts.

That never stopped him from ultimately doing them, though. But the pesky say so's in his mind were irksome. Toothless had been rather mad with him before, even if the night fury was somehow able to hide his thoughts from Hiccup sometimes, he felt one thing for sure as he walked awayâ€|fear.

He was able to scare a night fury. But for all the wrong reasons. Toothless was guarded, too guarded, and suddenly all the memories of the conversations he had with the two nightmares a short while back filled his mind. How they spoke of himâ€"or at least Hiccup thought it was himâ€"with such urgency, like he was a threat. Could simply hearing a dragon's thoughts be their own downfall? Was he really more powerful than even he gave credit to his own ability?

Was heâ€|.?

"Prince Hiccup, I said I'm finished." Alastair slammed the leather coverings down on the table, snapping Hiccup out of his fog of questions and rushing thoughts. He swallowed and looked up, looking peaked.

Alastair surveyed him with lidded eyes and rolled his own.

"You barely got any sleep last night and it's already close to morning. Perhaps we can put off finishing the tail for another day so you can get your rest?" Alastair suggested, Hiccup hearing the worry in his voice being overrode by a sense of almost motherly authority, but he shook it off.

Bed sure sounded nice, but figuring out how to strike a deal with Toothless and gain his trust back sounded better.

"We'll be finished in another hour if we keep working." He told him. "It's pointless stop now." He heard Alastair groan and lean against the table. The boy was done with what he was told to do, and Hiccup began to place the leather loosely over the metal skeleton, trying to get it in place. "Well," Hiccup continued, "At least be useful and hand me the pins."

"At least be _useful!_?" Alastair glared and Hiccup gulped. That probably wasn't the best choice of words. "I was 'useful' all night sewing this stupid tail together at Odin knows how late at night all

to support you and a dragon whose probably going to kill us if we get within ten feet of that cove andâ€œ"

"Okay, Alastair," Hiccup rolled his eyes with a smile. Always with the ranting. But despite the boy's complaints Hiccup knew he wasn't going anywhere. The events that night proved that among anything. He smiled. An actual friendâ€œ|. two in fact. And probably the most unlikely picks of the liter.

A deadly dragon and a warrior. Two things that had run Hiccup's motivation for so long and now he had them both, but in a way he never would've expected.

Alastair handed him the pins and held down the leather while Hiccup sewed the lining tracks along the skeleton tightly. It was a bit of a long, quiet process yet again. The crackling of the coals in the fire pit, Alastair's light breathes, the scoffs of their feet against the stone floor, and the pull and scrape of the needle pulling at the leather.

Hiccup pulled at the thread while Alastair leaned over him, holding the framework down sturdily. The close proximity was a little weird, especially in the heat already weaving through the room, but it seemed it was making Alastair fidget. His hands were tapping on the leather a little too frequently and his hands were leaving sweaty prints on the leather, which would surely ruin it.

Hiccup wasn't sure whether to say something or just keep the process going since they were nearing their end. He bit his lip, remembering the conversation they had while walking back to the palace that afternoon. About how he would practice his mind reading on Alastair.

The boy seemed rather opposed to the idea, but as Hiccup said, he didn't really need Alastair's confirmation to read his mind if he couldâ€œ|.

He worked a bit slower in an attempt to prolong keeping Alastair in a close range to maximize the accessibility. He took deep breaths opening his mind as he did with Toothless. Though when he was speaking with Toothless, the bond seemed a bit more natural, now that he was actually searching for a mind to read without any reception, it seemed very forced and gave him a bit of a headache.

He saw Alastair fingers drum even more, and tried to focus on his actions. Why was he drumming his fingers? Why were his palms so sweaty? Perhaps focusing on what thoughts he was looking for would make the process more organic?

Still searching, trying to find almost a channel of sorts but finding little luck. His mind was open, focused, and Alastair was right there.

Maybe it did only work on dragons?

"Ouch!" Alastair flinched back, his hands finally pulling back from the leather, but with a slight sticky resistance, a sweaty hand print left where his hand had been.

Hiccup's eyes widened and turned to see Alastair cradling his finger,

it had been pricked by his needle, no doubt because he had been paying more attention to reading his mind then where his needle was going. Sloppy work on his part. He frowned, standing while Alastair rubbed the small dot of blood off with his finger, only to have another on form quickly.

"I'm so sorry Alastair," Hiccup sighed. A needle prick was a minor injury, but it seemed so much more significant just because it was the third injury Alastair had received because of him all within a little shy of a month.

"It's just a needle prick, calm down." Alastair smiled a bit. "But you see, I told you that you were sleepy, you weren't even paying attention to your sewing."

Hiccup frowned again. He knew where this was goingâ€|

"We'll finish the tail tomorrow morning for sure, but right now you need to get some sleep."

Hiccup was going to counter his suggestions when a large yawn rolled off his tongue. He sighed slightly afterwards, looking at the tail. It was nearly done, just the last line to sew up, but it was probably a bit risky to work on something as important to being sturdy as Toothless's prosthetic tail while he was so tired.

"Fine, Mom," Hiccup teased and snuffed out most of the fire, only leaving slight embers of burning to wrap the room in an eerie glow. The unfinished tail glowing with Alastair's sweated hand prints.

"I don't appreciate being called a mother you know," Alastair crossed his arms.

"And I don't appreciate being treated like a child." Hiccup snapped back, though his words were dulled by the sleepy roll in his voice.

"Well then start being practical." Alastair continued, obviously still liking a good argument even at the late hour. "You have to fight Snotlout in a week, you know, is staying up until you can barely see straight going to be your strategy?"

"Alastair, please," Hiccup rubbed his temples. "It's too late for this."

"Well, you know, I was kind of impressed that you stood up to Snotlout like that, but now I'm thinking you're going to goof off and make a fool of yourself."

Something boiled up within Hiccup then, he wasn't sure whether it was anger, worry, sadness, but it was something and it left acid marks rising up in his throat.

"I just, I've taken a few swordsman lessons." Hiccup stammered. He had one of the best swords made in all of Berk hanging on his wall for decoration. A present from one of the higher ranking chiefs from his 12th birthday, of course he had taken lessonsâ€|

"And were you any good at them?" Alastair probed further. And that question was like kicking him in the ankles. Sure he had taken a few

lessons, but the result was the expected one. And his silence in the question's answer did all the answering it needed to.

Alastair sighed. "That's what I thought." Hiccup looked up at him, the room was rather dark other than the faint glow of the embers and the light coming the crack in the door leading back to his bedroom. But Alastair wasn't moving, and for some reason, Hiccup wouldn't either.

"I know it was impulsive, okay," Hiccup said quietly, wanting to get it out but almost not wanting Alastair to hear him. "Just, you were there, you heard what was said." I can't let what little respect I have left around here go out the window just because my father doesn't think I can do this job."

Alastair gave a light breath, walking up a few more steps towards him before placing a hand on his shoulder. "Well you are only fourteen." Snotlout's seventeen, you know."

"I know but it's my birthright." Hiccup tried his hardest not to sound like he was whining, though it seemed next to impossible at that point. "I'm failing at the one thing I was born to do."

"Maybe, you weren't meant to be King?" Alastair offered, just as quietly. Hiccup just regarded the statement with a half-hearted stare with just a tad of exposure. "I think you're destined for greater things than just being king, Prince Hiccup." He finished. "But I'm behind you one hundred percent, so if it's in the interest of beating Snotlout." The boy slide his hand off Hiccup's shoulder and walked lightly passed him, finally opening the door fully and flooding the room with the bedroom's candle light. "I can teach you what I know about swordsmanship."

Hiccup couldn't hide his smile. "R-really?" He brightened.

"Of course. I am a warrior after all. Atlas taught me everything he knew before he left."

Hiccup felt a swell of power come over him. All of the thoughts he had always carried of beating Snotlout in something were forming a bubble of hot air deep in his stomach and it felt good. Alastair left in a small smile, going quietly into his own quarters and whispering a small and tight "goodnight" before closing the door.

Hiccup looked back at Toothless's tail. It was going to take a lot of good fortune for the night fury to go along with any plan Hiccup had to present. But it seemed just for a moment that things were going well. He had a warrior on his side to teach him some swordsmanship, and the first prototype of Toothless's tail was underway. If Toothless accepted he'd be on his way to stopping the dragons and Viking war all together.

Being a war hero and earning back his respect things were definitely looking up if fortune stayed in his favor.

And as wistful as it was to bask in just the sweet thoughts of a good future, Hiccup went to bed with a light dusting of a smile over his lips. He simply couldn't help himself.

The morning came far too early.

It always seemed like such a good idea to stay up all night but then Hiccup was always horribly reminded every morning why the idea wasn't as bright as the morning sun that woke him.

Alastair's hand shook him awake, shoving a basket of sewing supplies in his face. He was already fully dressedâ€|cape forgotten at the moment, yet with a well rested look despite the fact that he stayed up just as late.

Damn warriors, Hiccup thought.

"Rise and shine, Prince charming." Alastair smiled in a jest. "I told you that I'd help get the tail done in the morning didn't I?"

"Uhgnnn," Hiccup groaned, pulling the covers back over his head, but Alastair simply grabbed them off again.

"Prince Hiccupâ€|come on!" He called out. "Don't you want to start the first day of so many good days?"

His eyes snapped open. Alastair mirroring his thoughts once again. He was beginning to get a little good at thatâ€|.maybe the mind reading wasn't a completely failure?

Still, without a second word, Hiccup kicked his feet over the edge of the bed, scratching his stomach and yawning.

"I'm upâ€|" he said groggily but with a confidence that he could feel Alastair's smile even with his back turned to him.

Finishing the tail took no time at all, a few more stitches and fixing a few that he had messed up the previous night and everything looked good to go. The only problem wasâ€|

"How are we going to get this thing outside and unnoticed?" Alastair asked bluntly, glaring daggers at Hiccup as if he was really supposed to have all the answers.

"Okay minor setbackâ€|butâ€|..."

"Butâ€|?" Alastair probed yet again, but more annoyingly than anything.

"But," Hiccup gritted his teeth. "We can use a blanket."

Alastair's eyes only tightened.

"I'm not carrying a prosthetic tailfin wrapped in a blanket around the palace. Try again."

Hiccup let out a sighâ€|.he could always carry it, but they'd get less weird looks if Alastair was carrying something seemingly suspicious than if he was. Still, he looked around the forgeâ€|there was nothing really suited for carrying a tailfin, all he had that was long enough to carry it wasâ€|he looked to his wallâ€|the sword he

had gotten for his twelfth birthday. It came in a rather flashy and large decorative scabbard that hung on his wall. It might be long enough to fit the tail just enoughâ€|

Hiccup shot a sly look over to Alastair.

"What are you grinning about?" Alastair flinched, his knees buckling a bit.

"May I borrow your shoulders?"

"Myâ€|what?"

It was probably the oddest thing for Arte to walk in on, in Hiccup's opinion, The sword was suspended right over the door, and to reach it Hiccup had to climb on Alastair's shoulders. He was just about to grab it when, of course, the door opened.

Hiccup could practically feel Alastair's entire body heat up and the boy jolted backwards, yelping and taking Hiccup with him. If he hadn't already have grabbed the sword all of that would've been a waste. Luckily, though, he, Alastair, and the sword all went tumbling down together. A mess of limbs, cloths, discarded boots, and a confused Arte at their north.

"Going to train for your little battle with your cousin?" Arte almost chuckled. "Looks like it's going well."

Hiccup grimaced, having fallen rather hard on his jaw but right by his face was Alastair's hand, and he saw it clench into a tight fist just before he stood.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, we are going to train. The young prince is taking this duel very seriously and I see to it that he shows his true talent as a capable defense in the fight."

Hiccup's jaw practically dropped. Alastair had stood up for him beforeâ€|yet every time a new tingle went through him. It was a pop of sorts, having someone stand by you even with nothing to gain from it, he felt as ifâ€|he might actually get used to the dependency of Alastair.

Arte's eyes narrowed, eyeing the two boys. "Well then, that's quite a bold move on your part, Alastair." She stepped lightly over Hiccup and began her morning chore of stripping his bed.

Hiccup stood, glaring at Arte with a certain demon he reserved especially for her. No doubt she would go about telling the palace crew and town of Alastair's "bold" words. Such bouts of gossip kept her thriving, kept her mask of lady chattering on tight. She was so fakeâ€|and it made Hiccup's blood boil at the artificial skin of the women he had been forced to encounter. Of the people he had been forced to encounter.

Still, he looked over at Alastair, the boy brushing himself off and discretely placing the tail in the scabbard. He gave the sword within the sheath to Hiccup.

"Put it at your belt." Alastair told him, glaring himself at Arte before turning towards the door. "Shall we go?"

Hiccup did just that, slipping the sword into his belt and nodding firming. "Yes, let's go, Alastairâ€|we're going to need all the 'training' we can get." Hiccup whispered, though definitely made sure Arte heard.

0o0

The walk to the cove seemed almost eerily like a death sentence. A bare sword tugging at his belt and a mind full of questions, Alastair let out a muttered groan as he carried the tail. The plan was for him to carry it through the palace and hand it off to Hiccup afterwards, but the loyal warrior continued to trek with it even through the forest.

Hiccup smiled, he knew it was heavyâ€|but that was just the kind of warrior Alastair was.

"Are you calm?" Alastair asked suddenly, and Hiccup jumped slightly at his words. His whole stature was shakily so quickly it just left an almost non-existing jawing that kept rapidly tingling him. He jumped a bit, and he could feel the bones in his head crack.

"I'll take that as a no," Alastair rolled his eyes. "You have to calm yourself Prince Hiccup, I'm sure Toothless can sense it when you're nervous and given what happened last timeâ€""

"I get it, Alastairâ€|thank you." Hiccup shut his eyes, shoes still scuffing against the leaves.

Once they came up near the clearing of the cove Hiccup stopped, placing a hand in front of Alastair.

"What?" Alastair asked.

"It might be easier if I go aloneâ€|" He said, knowing that Alastair most likely wouldn't like the response. And hearing him suck his teeth only answered his thoughts.

"Oh no," Alastair protested. "I don't think so. I'm not going to let that dragon maul you and I just let you go alone."

"Toothless might feel threatened if we both show up after what happened last time."

"_He'll _feel threatened? He's a _Night Fury_!"

"Alastair, justâ€|trust me."

"We'll compromise," Alastair still insisted stubbornly. "I'll go down with you but I'll stay far back, okay?"

Hiccup took a step forward, looking down into the cove, Toothless was sleeping again, but no doubt the dragons' awareness had already picked up his presence. Hiccup closed his eyes for a moment, reaching out the hand of his subconscious.

_::Do you hear meâ€|?:: _He dared to question, only half assuming he'd get an answerâ€|.

â€|. .

Nothing.

"Prince Hiccup?" Alastair asked, his voice lighter that time.

"Yesâ€|that sounds good." Hiccup nodded and turned to climb before stopping, looking at Alastair.

"What?" He asked.

Hiccup took the sword from his belt and handed it before Alastair, yet outstretched his other hand. "The tailâ€|you've carried it all the way here, and you are staying back, right?" Hiccup said softly. "Give me the tail and you carry the sword. Toothless doesn't like weapons near him."

Alastair took the sword and placed it at his belt on the other side, as he was already carrying a sword of his own. But didn't relinquish the tail just yet. "I shall climb down with it." Alastair replied quickly, making no slow movements to already begin his climb down. "My Prince may have it once we're at the bottom."

Hiccup nearly rolled his eyes. "I thought we agreed to drop the proper act, Alastairâ€|"

As promised, though, Alastair stayed behind, stopping at the edge of the central lake as Toothless was to the far north of the cove, sleeping soundly in the shadows that, even in the lit day, covered him to almost non-distinguish.

Hiccup bit his lip as he walked slowly, his palms sweated much as Alastair's did that morning, sticking to the leather of the tail that had been shed from its scabbard and left behind with Alastair.

All he had was a tail and himself against a rather angry dragon that could read his every thought.

Hiccup left his mind wide open, searching for any avenue of communication, any strong admits of emotions from Toothless that he could read but found little luck. His mind seemed shut offâ€|and with his ranges all over it made Hiccup light headed to search so hard for a window of communication and find no reception.

Suddenly, though, as last time, Toothless's mind stirred all too suddenly and resulted in Hiccup's mind jolting at the in-pour of thoughts barrowing in his brain.

Toothless immediately stood, wings stretching at his bones in defense, teeth barred, eyes narrowed. And that fear was back again under its mask of pride and power. Hiccup's eyebrow twitched.

_::More of your deals you've brought me?:: _Toothless asked bitterly.
::After I told you to leave.::

::It's another day, isn't it?:: Hiccup almost smiled. _::Telling me to leave yesterday didn't ensure that I wouldn't be back today.::_

Toothless was not amused at his wit. The dragon's claws dug into the ground. Hiccup had half a mind to step back but instead he outstretched his arms, the tail before Toothless.

Toothless let his guard down only an inch, eyes wider in curiosity.

_:::What is this?::: _Hiccup heard Toothless's mind echo, not sure if he was supposed to hear that or not.

_:::A deal::: _Hiccup swallowed. It might've been in poor tact to bring up the deal again, but he knew very well the friendship with Toothless wasn't his only favor. He had a birthright to claim, a kingdom to save. A war to end.

Toothless barred his teeth again nonetheless.

:::I don't wish to have friendship with such deal givers:::

_:::Just listen to me, drop your pride and listen!::: _Hiccup let his mind slip almost screaming between his own ears. Toothless blinked, if anything impressed at the boy's show of stature. The night fury didn't speak, but sat quietly back in the shadowy grass, eyes still narrow, but guard taken down.

:::Speakâ€| .:::

Hiccup sighed, sitting down as well, placing the tail in the center of the distance between them.

:::I am Prince Hiccup Haddock the Third.:::

_:::You said titles weren't in need::: _Toothless quickly countered, as remembering Hiccup's claim that his title of "Prince" was not important.

_:::It is my birthright to one day rule over this colony of humans. This land is owned by my bloodline, and it is my duty to protect my people.::: _Hiccup explained. Running down the checklist in his brain almost robotically. It almost stung his mind to recall it. Arte's bitter words, Snotlout's cruel jests, and his father's looks of disappointment in which the list could never be what Hiccup wasâ€|

He looked up at Toothless, already knowing the desperation that oozed from him.

_:::I cannot give myself to a human.::: _Toothless replied slowly, though his mind ad picked up on Hiccup's sadness, that was certain. It was almostâ€|sympathetic.

_:::And you cannot live on the ground.::: _Hiccup stated firmly. _:::A dragon is really only as powerful as its flightâ€|it's means to get away.::: _He remembered the sayings that he had heard among the warrior's training regiments. _:::A downed dragon is a dead dragon.:::_

_:::I am not of normal breed.::: _Toothless snuffed.

_:::Neither am I.::: _Hiccup smirked. _:::I speak to you, don't I?:::_

Toothless looked down at the tail between them, curiosity still flooding his vision and mind.

:::And this contraption is the deal?:::

:::I can give you the ability to fly againâ€|:::

_:::Ohâ€|?::: _A twinge of hope popped within Toothless, his ears twitched, chest jerked, pupils rounded.

_:::But I need an ally in return.::: _Hiccup said simply. _:::You and I both have positions of power, my people and your kind are dying needlessly because of this warâ€|we can end itâ€|togetherâ€|:::_

There was a long moment of silence, Toothless's mind was still, closed off once again. It was odd when the night fury did so. Such an open connection that free thoughts could float between space and suddenly a hand clenched over that freedom.

Hiccup stayed still, playing with the grass between his fingers while Toothless stared at the prosthetic between them. He had said all he couldâ€|he needed Toothless's trust if anything was going to continue. But would he get itâ€|?

_:::This war is far beyond youâ€|::: _Toothless finally replied, the thoughts almost in a whisperâ€|or a plead of sorts.

:::Is it?:::

:::Yes.:::

:::And what about you?:::

:::My past is a dangerous thingâ€|and my future makes it flee for the skies. It's best I not involve a weak human boy:::

Hiccup's brow twitched.

_:::I am NOT weak!::: _Hiccup yelled. _:::I have my strength to come to you and ask for help, don't I?:::_

_:::Misunderstandâ€|::: _Toothless sighed.

:::Then make me understand! I know your kind fears humans, or else you wouldn't be planning to burn down my people in the first place.:::

:::What they fear, I hope, has nothing to do with you.:::

:::I need your help, Toothless! Pleaseâ€|will you help me at least try to end all this killing?:::

More silenceâ€|but the dragon's mind stayed open.

Sympathy, regret, tentative acceptanceâ€|.guiltâ€|.guiltâ€|.

Why was he so guilty?

:::This thing will allow me to fly again?:::

:::I hope so, it hasn't been tested, obviously.:::

:::And what makes you think I won't fly away?:::

:::It's a foolish thought that you won't butâ€|we are friends, aren't we?:::

:::Who's pride now?:::

Hiccup smiled at the light-heartedness of Toothless's comment.

:::Don't act like you don't careâ€|I know you do. I might not be as skilled as you but I can still read your thoughts.:::

:::You read what I allow. I have a greater command than you.:::

_:::I can still feel itâ€|::: _Hiccup's smile grew.

:::Whatâ€|?:::

:::That you're my friend even when you're mad at me.:::

Toothless was silent, growling a bit.

:::Companionship is new to me.:::

_:::It is for me too, butâ€|I'm learning.::: _Hiccup looked over his shoulder at Alastair. The boy stood by the lake, looking down into the water.

:::That one with the weaponsâ€|?:::

_:::Alastair won't hurt you.::: _Hiccup assured. _:::He's just not as comfortable around you. But he's getting there. He's very protective of me.:::_

:::You said it was her job.:::

_:::At first it was Alastair's job but I'm starting to see that he really is myâ€|::: _Hiccup trailed. "Her jobâ€|" He echoed back and then smiled. Silly dragon. _:::No, Toothless, Alastair is a boy. I know he acts a bit motherly and has bright hair but he's a warrior.:::_

_:::Your scents are different.::: _Toothless explained.

_:::Well, yes, all humans have unique scents, I suppose.::: _Hiccup shook his head. _:::You haven't been around many humans personally, have you?:::_

_:::Only to spill their blood.::: _Toothless said casually, licking the backside of his claws a few times.

Hiccup was going to say something, but bit his tongue, standing

swiftly to grab the tail. Toothless was still a dragon, he'd just have to get used to the fact that he had killed many humans, just as Hiccup had rooted for the side that had killed many of Toothless's own.

_::I have to put it on youâ€|:: _A fresh new wave of panic came through Hiccup's blood. Toothless was never one for touching. But it was beginning to become unavoidable.

Toothless didn't seem pleased, standing slowly and turning, his tail in the forefront. Hiccup moved quickly and readied the tail, strapping it down next to Toothless's other tail fin, praying to all the Gods that the measurements he acquired from the severed fin were correctâ€|and by the way it fit, they were good enough.

It was not too much, but still odd, the leather straps were mostly occupying Hiccup's hands but every stray moment of so he'd brush the surface of the night fury's exterior. Few had a human been so close to a dragon to feel it's skin without sudden death.

"Alrightâ€|not too badâ€|" Hiccup mumbled to himself, smiling a little at his work. His mind was filled with congratulatory thoughts to himself and he paid no heed as Toothless must've taken those forward thoughts as a time to actually sprint forwards. His tail whipped up as his wings went taunt at his bones again and took off into the sky, Hiccup bobbing with him. "Wha!" Hiccup screamed, and down below he could hear Alastair calling his name in a panic, running from his resting place. His motherly nature probably having a breakdown.

Hiccup's back was whipped with a rush of wind, his hair tapping at his neck with urgency almost. His reflexes made him grip for dear life onto Toothless's tail, his arms and legs hooking around like a vice.

"T-Toothless!" Hiccup screamed out, finally opening his eyes to see the cove and Alastair growing smaller and smaller beneath him. He looked at the tail, it was flapping through the wind like it was a piece of clothâ€|why wasn't it opening?

_::This contraption isâ€|:: _Toothless started to say, almost soundingâ€|excited. Hiccup's mind was so closed because he was so scared and contemplative he didn't realize Toothless's excitement, but he felt the fear when the weight underneath him dropped alongside his stomach and Toothless began to fall from the sky. _::This contraption isâ€|:: _Toothless repeated the same thoughts, though only disappointment filled him that time.

Hiccup's stomach was dropping and floating at the same time but if anything his mind told him one thingâ€|if the tail didn't open, it wouldn't work. He scooted up a bit and quickly grabbed the side of the tail, pulling it open a few feet from a crash landing. Toothless whipped his tail down and almost smacked the ground before flying upwards, his tongue falling from his mouth in excitement.

Hiccup almost let out a laugh as he held onto the tail. "It'sâ€|It's workingâ€|!" He turned the fin upwards and to the left, and Toothless banked left over the cliffs, a new rush of wind jetting into Hiccup's ears.

It was almost too much for him, his stomach feeling like it was bobbing around in his skin, his ears ringing, hands taunt from holding on too closely, and hair hopeless wind shaken. But it was exhilarating to look down and see that ground he had walked for miles through look so small.

The slight calm opened up his mind a bit, and Toothless was filled with joy yet again, and it made him smile even as the wind whacked his face.

Toothless began to turn and Hiccup couldn't figure which way to turn the tail, he turned it down, and Toothless's wings went right and then!

The ground was getting bigger, and a growl ripped from Toothless's throat as well as Hiccup's.

"Hiccup!" He faintly heard Alastair scream over the rustle of wind and growling of a night fury. Toothless was able to glide down into the water, still rather roughly, though. But when the lake water all flowed into his ear and smacked his face sideways Hiccup felt his jaw crack.

Toothless's dark figure swerved around him in the water and for a moment Hiccup couldn't make out if he was up or down. He felt claws grabbing at the back of his shirt and dragging him down which was actually up. Air breezed over his wet face and filled his lungs as he spat out water and grabbed onto the grassy bank, the dirt turning to mud under his fingernails.

"Hiccup!" Alastair ran up again, dropping to his knees and taking his shoulders and pulling him out of the water. "Prince Hiccup why were you two being so reckless? Flying wasn't part of the plan today!"

All Hiccup heard was rambling noises, his ears still too filled with water and his mind too messed.

"Silence, please, Alastair." Hiccup groaned and flopped on his back, panting heavily. He looked over at Toothless, the dragon seemed in the same state, though Hiccup felt that he had somehow ruined Toothless's good mood. How could he have been so stupid, thinking the tail would just operate itself?

Toothless cut his eyes over to Hiccup as well, sorrow masked with that same pride.

_::I'm sorry::: _Hiccup tried to communicate.

_::This deal::: _Toothless trailed.

_::It'll work::: I just need to make some modifications.::: _Hiccup could tell that Toothless didn't quite believe him. _::You just have to trust me, Toothless. I'll get you flying again.:::_

_::Alright::: The dragon sighed, and stood, shaking the water off of himself. Hiccup got up as well, ignoring Alastair's pleas to take it easy. Hiccup walked right in front of Toothless, stopping him. There was a twinge of disbelief in Toothless's last

words.

::Toothlessâ€| I promise you I will get you flying. I'll keep up my end of the deal.:

The disbelief didn't fadeâ€|but one thing drifted in. Trust.

Hiccup smiled.

He reached out a little, trying to touch Toothless but the dragon reared away, snapping back and barring his teeth.

"Stillâ€|?" Hiccup sighed and frowned. Toothless trusted him to some extent, he could feel it. So why was he still so closed off? Nonetheless, pushing Toothless to do too many things he didn't want to in one afternoon wasn't going to solve anything and Hiccup instead gave the dragon a slight bowâ€"which was generally useless to a night fury but it was engraved as good manners on Hiccup's partâ€"and turned away to leave.

"Come on Alastair."

"What about the tail?" Alastair asked, jumping up from the edge of the lake.

"Ahâ€|yeah." Hiccup turned back to Toothless only to find that Toothless's tail was in front of him. Hiccup smiled and unhooked it quickly, letting it fall off Toothless's tail to into the grass. Toothless quickly moved towards Hiccup, and scooted the prosthetic closer to his feet and looked at him a bit sorrowfully.

_::Fix itâ€|:: _Toothless said, though it wasn't a commandâ€|.it felt more like a plead. Hiccup's chest clenched, the flutter of his heart and the soreness still left over from where Toothless clawed him the previous day. He nodded, picking up the tail and turning away for a second time only to have his back touched by a dragon noseâ€|

He turned to look at Toothless, the dragon's eyes wide and timidâ€|all of his pride seemed to be seeping out. The exhilaration of reliving flight must've poured sugar on his bitter mood.

Hiccup held out his hand again, reaching forward but Toothless growled again, though his eyes softened immediately after.

"Toothlessâ€|" Hiccup breathed, swallowing and closing his eyes to look away. His hand outstretched and heart pounding. Was he just making a fool of himself again? He felt the friendship, but if Toothless wouldn't accept it than what good was it? So what if their deal did work, it didn't entail that he and Toothless really had to beâ€"

He felt a dry yet somehow soft nose touch his palm, it was coy, not pressing too much, but it was there. Hiccup swallowed again, his stomach flipping, and he moved his palm a little before Toothless pulled away, shaking his nose.

_::Oddâ€|:: _Was the only thought Hiccup could get from Toothless before he ran off, going back into the shadows of the cove.

Hiccup fully opened his eyes, looking at his hand and smiling fondly.

The day had gone a lot better than he thought.

0o0

When Hiccup had finally seen the dragon place his nose in Hiccup's palm Astrid had felt like she had finally seen it all.

"How did it feel?" Astrid asked as they climbed their way back up the cove's cliff side and through the forest.

"Dry and soft at the same timeâ€|and you can feel his heartbeat under his skinâ€|" Hiccup was smiling as he spoke, still holding his own hand. Astrid didn't know if she would've been as mooning if she had touched a dragon in such a manor, but it was always nice to see the Prince smiling at affairs going his way.

Which brought her to another thought entirely. His duel with Snotlout. No amount of dragon friendship would allow his birthright so soonâ€|they'd need time before that could happen, and if Hiccup lost the battle with his cousin, there might not be a birthright to save.

She still held the tail. Her own sword on her belt besides her axe that day, and Hiccup's sword on her person as well. She had been planning to teach him swordsmanship at one time or another.

Hiccup was still rambling about this and that maybe to himself or maybe Astrid was supposed to be listening. Nonetheless she placed a hand in front of Hiccup and looked up, some spare leafs falling from the taller trees. Hiccup followed her vision and Astrid locked her eyesight on the biggest leaf floating downâ€|landing right for Hiccup nose.

"Umâ€|Alastairâ€|" Hiccup raised a brow.

She ripped out her sword, taking a proper stance and cutting the leaf straight in half right before it landed at Hiccup's nose. He blinked, standing completely still as the blade nearly sliced his face. But there was no need to worry.

"Hey, Alastair!" Hiccup scowled. "You trying toâ€"

Astrid whipped the sword towards him, the point right near his nose. His brows knitted together, but he didn't dare move.

"Lesson one of swordsmanship, always know your target." She flung the sword up and sliced yet another falling leaf in half. Hiccup only blinked again.

She took down her sword and took out Hiccup's handing it to him. "Lessons start now." She said firmly.

"Nowâ€| .?"

"Would you prefer to waste time until the duel and look like an idiot?" Astrid sucked her teeth. "You said you were going to take this seriously, and just because things with Toothless are good

doesn't mean you get to prance around like nothing's wrong."

Hiccup took the sword, looking at it with a pout. Astrid almost rolled her eyes. He was so confident and collected when with Toothless yet his childishness always shown through when faced with something he didn't want to do. Heat of the moment or not he accepted the duel, and Astrid had told Arte she was making it her responsibility to see that Hiccup did well.

Hiccup held the sword sloppily, twisting it in his hands in front of his face, Astrid sighed and reared his sword up with her own, locking their eyes.

"Know your target!" She said in a hiss.

"You?" Hiccup asked, almost smiling in amusement.

"For now." She lunged back before sprinting towards him, Hiccup was able to hold off her first attack, his wrists shaking, his stance sloppy, but at least he blocked her. She cut the sword underneath stopping right at his stomach, and pushed her wrist into his side instead, knocking him down with an "oof".

He scowled at her.

"Lesson two, never leave any part of your body open for attack." She narrowed her eyes. "That fall could've been my blade cutting through your skin. And Snotlout won't be so merciful."

"You? you really think he'd?" Hiccup swallowed.

"I don't know him as well as you do! so you tell me." Astrid looked at him, face sweaty, back wrinkled from being with Toothless and shirt hopelessly water dampened and covered in shards of forest debris. Astrid sighed and extended her hand, which he gladly took.

"I want to see you succeed, my Prince." Astrid said softly. "Even though I think you're better than ruling over this mess of a kingdom!"

"And you?" Hiccup looked over at her, patting out his shirt.

"What about me?"

"Are you better than this?"

Astrid bit her lip, her grip loosening on her sword. Hiccup could communicate with dragons, was able to see past the years of killing to know that they were good! that was still beyond her range of thinking. She knew he was better than Berk and whole Viking society. But she had her own reasons! her brother. What if she was just there on her own merits? If she was just a silly girl who wanted to fight so she dressed in pants? Would that make her better or worse?

Did it even make sense that she was helping the Viking Prince defeat someone everyone thought was better for the role of King? Or that she was technically becoming a warrior to avenge her brother's death! her father's death! the death of any other member of her

family at the hands of dragons and yetâ€|she was helping Hiccup befriend one.

Her head began to throb and she dropped her sword, clutching her temples.

"Alastairâ€|!" Hiccup dropped his sword as well and went over to her, hovering about her in plain uncertainty of what to do. It was so funnyâ€|comforting another male must be hard for him, she thought. Another odd thing. She could very well tell Hiccup of her true gender, it's not like they didn't share enough secrets already. Soâ€|why didn't she?

The hole she was digging herself in just kept getting deeper and she didn't even know why she kept digging it so deep in the first place. She could have a confidant, someone who knew her for what she wasâ€|

"We should head backâ€|" Hiccup said firmly. "Arte will probably start a ruckus about how long I've been out." He looked up, narrowing his eyes.

"She's quite a handfulâ€|" Astrid tried to lighten the mood and quell her turbulent thoughts. It was a good thing Hiccup really couldn't hear her thoughtsâ€|or maybe he didâ€|..? She felt a squeak rise in the back of her throat. Did he really know and was just not saying anything? If that was trueâ€|was it just too disgusting for him to talk about?

"It's just how woman are." Hiccup shrugged. Astrid's brows knitted.

"What?" She almost hissed.

"They act so dainty and perfect but they're just as calculating as men are."

"You're calling yourself, I mean, you're calling us calculating as well?"

"We are sneaking around with a night fury, are we not?"

"I supposeâ€|"

"Women and men are all alike, just women get away with things."

Her stomach felt punched.

"Not everythingâ€|" She muttered.

"What do you mean?"

Damnâ€|he heard herâ€|

"I think there's too much pressure forâ€|women to be a certain way. To be acceptedâ€|.if they were treated like equals they wouldn't have to feel the need to act one way and really be another."

Hiccup blinked a bit.

"Alastair!"

"What?" She answered a bit too quickly.

"Did you have a girlfriend back home?"

"Prince Hiccup," Astrid sighed, they had already had that conversation, sort of!

"I know when Ash Eyes..." Hiccup shut his eyes for a moment. "I know you said you weren't all that smooth but, that's a lot to say about it!"

"No," Astrid took a deep breath, her heart pounding. He didn't know he didn't know she kept telling herself. Maybe she'd believe it at some point. "I didn't have a girlfriend, just an open mind. You see a lot more of real women when you're not stuck in palace all your life."

Hiccup frowned chewing her words and hopefully accepting them. To her relief, a few moments later, he smiled and elbowed her softly.

"Maybe we'll figure out the mystery of women eventually?"

She felt her previous question of why she wouldn't tell Hiccup had somehow been answered and yet not been answered. He hated Arte for acting one way and being another. Practically every woman he'd been around had been that way thanks to the society of things. So what would he think of her if he found out she was also nothing but a lie?

"Something tells me you will..." She said before she picked up her sword and put it back in its sheath. They'd really get down to business the next day, with Toothless and with sword lessons. But her mind wasn't sharp enough for any lessons at that point, and something told her, neither was Hiccup's.

"The mighty wisdom of Alastair is coming through again." Hiccup laughed before frowning and looking at her rather deeply. It always caught her odd guard when he did that. "So you really don't know if you're better than this, huh?"

Astrid sucked in a breath. She had never answered his question. But to be honest she didn't know. Her whole friendship with the prince felt so true yet so fake. What was her real intentions at that point?

"Honestly, my prince, I can't answer that..." Was all she offered before bending down to pick up the tail but Hiccup already had the same idea. Her fingers brushed his and she immediately snapped them away, not feeling worthy at the moment to even touch him.

"You're going to carry it?" She asked.

"Yeah," he shrugged. "Take it easy on the way back, you've earned it."

She smiled. "The prince who almost got mauled, flew, fell into a lake, and got wacked into the ground with my sword is telling me to

take it easy!"

"Well I guess when you put it that way, you probably should be carrying this." Hiccup laughed.

"Nah!" She shrugged. "Like you said, I've earned it."

OoO

There was six days before the duel, and each day went exactly the same.

Wake up early, go to the cove, try out some new tail modifications, take notes on what was needed, practice swordsmanship in the forest until dinner, eat, work on the tail modifications until there were just enough hours left in the night to get a reasonable amount of sleep.

With Snotlout taking care of matters their afternoons weren't wasted standing by Royal matters just for the propriety of things.

Though Astrid was convinced that the ethics of flight were even beyond Hiccup. The concept of what was wrong was easy to identify. The tail needed something to move it. But how could Toothless move it on his own?

Hiccup tried some prototypes with him flying on the back of the night fury for the time being, and it proved a tad easier but still he always got tossed off.

In a last attempt for the day on day five, Hiccup tried to simply tug at the tail via a connection with his foot and string connected to the tail. Astrid pressed her palm to her forehead. Even she knew that wasn't going to work.

"His desperation is showing!" She shook her head. But then, he didn't have time to think of something brilliant the previous night for she made him go to sleep early.

His sword lessons were suffering, and at that point Astrid wasn't sure if it was because of sleep or just because he really was that bad at it.

Her other hand joined the other on her forehead as Hiccup and Toothless crashed down into the water again. It was such a common state now, she only walked over, extending a helping hand as he swam to the edge.

"Still no luck?"

"This tail is cursed!" Hiccup yelled and kicked the grass as he stomped away. Astrid sat the edge, he always pouted like that and stomped around at the end of each session. He'd cool off and be ready to try again like normal.

Suddenly she found a light sparkle in the water, she had noticed something twinkling for the past few days, but it seemed brought up closer to the surface with all the ruckus. Reaching out into the water before it sank again she pulled out a dagger?

It seemed a little rusted and water ruined but it was a handsome weapon. It looked familiar and Astrid realized it was the dagger Hiccup had been carrying around all that time. She had wondered why all of a sudden he wasn't armed, even at the slightest. Not that her and him were ever apart for him to need to protect himself but still, a prince needed the provisions to be self protected. Other things but wild dragons might've been wandering the forests of Berk.

So why was it in the lake? Maybe he dropped it when he landed in and never realized it was gone? Either way, she packed it away in her boot. Remembering Hiccup saying the night fury didn't like weapons, and she didn't need Toothless thinking she was conspiring against him to screw up his relationship with Hiccup.

She looked up at the sun; it was beginning to deepen in the sky. They had been there longer than they should've. "Prince Hiccup!" She called out. "The sun's pretty deep, we should get to practicing your sword lessons before it's too dark to see."

His shoulders slumped and he went over to Toothless, the two stared or "communicated" and then Hiccup reached out and pet the side of the dragon's head. Toothless went from striking to docile in moments, seeming almost calmed by Hiccup's touch.

She smiled; yep, she had certainly seen it all.

0o0

"I brought back your dinner!" Astrid sighed, placing his fish plate down next to him. He had his head buried in his arms, a small wooden model of Toothless pooling in a circle of wood shavings all hopelessly tangled in Hiccup's hair.

"Um|Prince Hiccup|?"

He groaned and peaked his eyes up at her. "I'm thinking."

"You're exhausted. Eat your dinner and get some rest, the duel is coming up day after tomorrow and!"

"And I'm going to lose, I know!" He yelled, the sudden spike in his voice making her chest flutter almost painfully.

"I didn't say that." She tried to calm him, though the reserved volume in her voice probably gave away her discomfort.

"You didn't have to." Hiccup continued, burying his face back into his arms. "I saw your face after we finished the lessons today| You might as well have given up on me." He didn't sound whiney; his voice was dull, and he spoke almost matter-of-fact-like. It worried Astrid a little more. She had remember how he sounded in the History Gallery a few weeks back, seeing the pictures of his ancestors and feeling inferior. It was a state she rather not see him in.

"I just don't want Snotlout to hurt you is all," she crossed her arms and looked away. Eye contact with him wasn't something she could handle at the moment.

"You think I'm!"

The word "weak" floated between them.

"Whatever you're about to say, I _don'tâ€|. _I'm justâ€|" Astrid chewed her bottom lip.

"Just what?"

"Concerned, okay? I wish I'd been more help." Astrid still looked over to the side of the forge, her chapped lips tasting bitter under her teeth.

"Alastairâ€|" Hiccup sighed, a pain coming his voice, yet a solace resided as well. "Don't blame my inability to do anything Vikingly on yourself. Maybeâ€| maybe I'll just forfeit?"

"And be humiliated?"

His eyes softened and narrowed all at the same time. "I'm going to be humiliated either way. I'm just sorry you're going to be humiliated too, you did say that you would see to it that I trained."

"And you have beenâ€|" Astrid said softly. The duel was the talk among the palace, Hiccup was right about the humiliation if he did lose. News and entertainment had been slow. Dragon raids weren't plentiful anymore to keep a spark of nervous excitement circulating, but Astrid gulped in knowing why. The dragons were planning something much bigger, and this grace period was just an eerie calm before a perfect storm.

"We still have one more day," Astrid offered. "Maybe I can teach you a few tricks to get around this?"

"Alastairâ€| come on. There are no tricks, justâ€| this." He held up the wooden carving. Some kind of rigging system wrapped around the model of Toothless's tail. "This deal with Toothless is the only thing I have to earn my respect back, it's my prime focus nowâ€|"

Astrid took the figure without response, though, looking at the petals on the sides, the careful rigging of the tail allowing better controlled movementâ€|. the detail of the wooden carving overall.

"Why'd you carve this and not draw it?" She asked.

"Ran out of charcoal, I'll have to send Arte into town to get some more." He shrugged.

"So you justâ€| carved this whole thing? That fast?"

He shrugged again, nodding.

The dagger in her boot seemed to strike her then, and she had a thought.

"What happened to that dagger you used to carry around?" She finally asked.

"Toothless didn't exactly like it so, I threw it in the lake. It's not like I could live up to its legacy anywaysâ€|" Hiccup cut his

eyes away, looking at the smaller knife he had used to carve.
"Besides, I've got you. You're pretty much a walking weapon."

Astrid wasted no time pulling the dagger out of her boot and placing it on the desk, watching the surprise and confusion bounce across Hiccup's face more than the flickering candle light.

"How did youâ€|where did youâ€|?"

"Eat dinner and get some sleep, tomorrow we're going to start a new training technique." Astrid commanded.

"Withâ€|_this_?" Hiccup looked down at the dagger quizzically.

"Dagger's do seem to be a strong point for you"

"Strong pointâ€|ha" Hiccup smirked. "Alastair made a joke. There might be hope for you, yet."

She pulled her axe out from leaning against the bed, whipping it towards Hiccup who immediately grabbed the dagger and blocked the blade with a swift underhanded grip. His wide eyes yet deft movements even surprised himself.

"You as well, Prince Hiccup," Astrid smiled. "You as well."

Whewâ€| 9000+ words on this one.

Anyways, Hiccup and Snotlout's duel is next chapter soâ€|it'll be worth the wait.

Review Responses:

Purplemistpepper: Yeah, "Tested and Dueled" has a lot going on, it's chronicling Hiccup working on Flying and training and then Dueling his cousin, two defining moments in is "plan". So, it's a lot. Chapter 8, believe it or not, is even longer than this one. But I'm glad you're enjoying the length of these chapters. Since this story is planning to be extremely long, if I had short chapters this story would easily push the 100+ chapter mark, and that many chapters might scare people off, plus, who doesn't like a nice big chapter to read?

Teen Nightfury: Sorry these utterly long periods between chapters are just nasty, but I'm working to fix it immediately, so just hang in there. And of course the fact that Alastair is Astrid will be revealed (that's not really a spoiler), just be patient cause it'll be a real shock as to how it's handled.

Immortaldragon2: Cool, thanks for being interested. Here's another chapter for you, so hope you enjoyed it.

2400shadow: Astrid's got a lot of conflict with her original goal, cause Hiccup's screwing up her motivations a lot (without even meaning to), so Astrid's got some stuff to deal with, but she's leaning towards being more loyal to Hiccupâ€|as you can seeâ€|and leaving her warrior duties behind. And I can't really say how the duel goes, be here for the next chapter to find out.

Daughter of Sea and Wisdom: Yeah, Snotlout's a piece of work, he's probably more like the Snotlout in the book series than in the movie franchise, but stillâ€œ|he's definitely got a lot of issues. But then, so does Hiccup. Hiccup's got a long ways to go before he can be King, if he decides that's what he wants to do, of course. Butâ€œ|I won't go there cause that's going into spoiler territory.

**Marcus S. Lazarus: Wow, I love nice meaty reviews such as these! And the reason the Viking Society is more like a male dominated Kingdom than how it was in the books and movie will be brought up later, cause there is a reason for that. But it does allow for, yes, Astrid's believable rebellion and Hiccup's somewhat skewed thoughts and slight bitterness on womanâ€œgiven the women he's been in close contact with are either airheads or two-faced. And Hiccup and Astrid's friendship is pretty "using and be used" at the moment, but their forced to be in close contact so, bonds happen, and the consequences of all that using will show up in their own ways.
**

**As for the Alastair/Astrid part, I'm glad you appreciate how it's handled, cause it can easily be ridiculous, but while I add things such as her going into a bath house and refusing to take a public bath and whatnot, I like to keep as realistic and not "fanservice" or just wacky antics as possible. **

And, yeah, Toothless's speech is something that will evolve, that's actually touched on briefly in the next chapter so I won't go into too much detail, but how we read Toothless's speech is basically just channeling through Hiccup (of course) so as the bond gets stronger the more fluent their communication will get. That becomes more evidence once more dragons are shown "talking" in comparison to how we read for Toothless.

And having Astrid there does add a new dynamic, I try to keep as she keeps to herself because she's not comfortable being around Toothless like Hiccup is, but she'll eventually have to break out of that if she wants to continually move forward at Hiccup's pace. Soâ€œ|thanks for such a great review! Gives me tons to talk about.

Guest: Thanks for liking the story. And, well, I don't wanna give spoilers as to the nature of Hiccup and Astrid's relationship in this story, but it should be both satisfying and shocking for everyone.

Namelesspierrot: Thank you! And I've gotten a few other compliments on the characterization, so I'm glad it's standing out cause it's rather tricky to keep everyone in character for this setting.

**Sweettea8: Wow, thanks so much, I'm glad you like my writing style and it gives you a feeling of "openness" (never heard that before). And thanks, Hiccup's probably the most fun to write personality-wise because of the fact that he's Hiccupâ€œ|yet he's Hiccup with this entitles attitude, but "Alastair's" a cold slap in the face as to how the real world outside the palace is so, he's going to get some really epic life lessons to humble him. And as the long personal note before the chapter entails, yeah, this is a long hiatus. This isn't a story I plan to abandon and it'll be around for quite a while (it's

gonna be looooong) so, just hang in there during the long breaks, but it'll always come back eventually.**

**SMaster01: Thanks, I put a lot of thought into the world of this story, and we're just on Berk at the moment, this story covers a lot of other exciting places! And I enjoy the Hiccup/Astrid story as well, it's exciting because it's soooo much different from the movie. And as for the familiar faces, they'll come eventually (trust me) just be a little patient. But chapter 9 does feature some good "around the village" stuff, Hiccup doesn't go into town much, so that's why we don't see it. He mostly just hangs around his room and the cove with Toothless and Astrid. And, thanks for the critique. Hopefully my finishing all the chapters in part one before publishing will help make them a bit more clean, grammar-wise. **

Thanks for the reviews people! This story shall be backâ€| just be patient.

Next Chapter: Tested and Dueled, Part 2

8. Tested and Dueled, Part 2

Shakes off dust

**Heeeeey there guys, remember me!? Yeah, I told you there'd be one more painstakingly long wait for this chapter and then I'd be back with a new and shiny uploaded schedule. **

So, here's the deal, I'll be updating this story on the 1**st**** and 15****th**** of every month, so that's two updates a month! I'm far ahead enough in the writing that I can pull off that schedule even with college so, rejoice!**

**And for your patience this chapter is ridiculously long and comes with art! **

blackrose108 . deviantart art / VikingPunk - Tale - Hiccup - Chapter - 8 - 397316435

Just remove the spaces and blah blah blah, you know the drill. Can't promise that there'll be art with every chapter but enjoy the craptastic splendor of my horrible chapter art!

Happy reading!

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Eight: Tested and Dueled, Part 2

Sweat dripped at his brow, his hands grasping and taunt. He panted out before letting out a primal growl, he wanted itâ€|

Astrid could only smile as the metal of her sword clinked at the metal of Hiccup's dagger, their eyes locked for many moments, but even she was spent on how to get out of the grip. They had been dueling all morning, the results seeming more and more off with Astrid's instructions on how to hold a weapon. Right handed firm grip. But it was only this duel that they seemed to be in a proper brawl.

Finally pushing her weight back she slid across the wooded dirt before running back towards him, her sword charging at the prince. He blocked her again, but she kept swinging, going straight for his neck when he tumbled under her, rolling and picking up some leafs among his tunic and pointed his dagger straight into her back, toppling her over by kneeing her just as quickly. Astrid swung her weight, putting every last ounce of momentum she had in one last strike. She turned her head and saw Hiccup's smug smile. He was so sure he had won but instead she lunged her sword forwardâ€|and the smile faded as he was pinned to the tree that stood proudly behind him, almost mocking his own pride as he stood with the shoulder of his tunic pinned by her sword so swiftly into the bark of the might tree.

He scowled, but all in good nature.

"Lesson oneâ€|?" Hiccup breathed.

"Lesson one." Astrid smiled.

Hiccup's smile returned, in the sleeve of his hand was a smaller knife, and he threw it forward, it didn't pin Astrid but landed at the tree right next to her cheek, a few strands of hair fell to the ground. She could only return his grin, though.

"And lesson threeâ€|always have a backup plan." Hiccup laughed. Astrid plucked the knife from the tree and walked over to Hiccup, taking her own sword out from his tunic.

"I don't believe I ever taught you that lessonâ€|" She said. "But keeping extra knifes on you is a good idea."

"I've read a book or two on assassination," Hiccup brushed off some of the dirt from his tunics. His white undershirt hopeless browned with mud and dirt. "Smaller knives seemed to be the preferred method."

"I thought we were dueling your cousin not committing a murder." Astrid cut her eyes. "Something you wanna tell me?"

"I'm just messing around, Alastair." Hiccup patted her shoulder.

Astrid rubbed her shoulder a bit, the injury she received what seemed like forever ago was slowing up, but it still tinged every now and then. She examined Hiccup's grip on his dagger, it was all wrong...

"Hiccup how in the world are you holding that dagger?" She asked.

Hiccup looked down, seeming perplexed.

"It's in the wrong hand and everything!" She continued.

"Oh...well...that's probably just because I have a dominant cursed hand." Hiccup shrugged. Astrid looked down and saw the visual evidence even as he stood. How he favored his left side-a curse it was for any man to be dominant on their left side...it was a curse.

But Astrid hardly believed that kind of myth anymore if Hiccup was one of them.

She walked up and took both his hands, they were wrapped around his dagger, and she examined the grip. It was correct, now that she looked more closely, it was just in the wrong hand. She smiled, no wonder he was able to finally pin her...he was using his dominant hand.

Hiccup looked away, distracted, out to the forest. It was mid afternoon, in about three more hours it would be too dark to see. Astrid caught his thought and simply nodded.

"Maybe we should head back to the palace? I think you're as ready as you're going to get at this point." Astrid suggested, but Hiccup's eyes were still out there. "What are you looking at?"

But that wasn't Hiccup's point. "Do you think my new modifications with Toothless will work?" Hiccup asked quietly instead of agreeing, the wind rustled over him as he turned to face her again. His eyes were dead serious, and with the muddied stains of his shirt and the determined wrinkle above his brow Astrid swallowed. It was hard to think him the same person when he got so intense.

"Well, I guess we'll find out after the duel." She answered lightly, she knew he didn't want such a light answer to a heavy question, but she wished he would focus on one pride lifting event at a time. Though, it was true, they hadn't gone to visit Toothless that day. Astrid insisted they spend from late morning to dusk practicing his new techniques with his dagger.

He still needed more training. His stance kept shifting and was never the firmest, he still left too many areas of his body open to puncture, but he was quick. His feet were light, and he was stirred on by the high of determination. Commendable in any fighter, in Astrid's opinion.

"We'll go see him after the duel tomorrow you'll probably want to see him afterwards no matter what the outcome."

Hiccup was still silent.

"Prince Hiccup?"

"It's just going to bother me if I don't do something about the modifications today!" Hiccup muttered, but Astrid had heard enough. She sighed and slid her sword back into its sheath, turning his shoulder to face her. "We need to head back before it's too dark to see. You know when you go to see Toothless you're there for hours at the least."

"I just need to at least see if it fits!" He bit his lip, looking down at his boots. Astrid followed his gaze and sighed.

"We're going to have to go back to the palace to get them." Astrid finally gave in, and at her words Hiccup perked up, grabbing her arm and pulling a few trees down to a hallow bark. "What's this?"

"We can store the rigging system in here." He pointed to the hallow of the tree beside them.

"Why? We carry the tail." Astrid raised a brow.

"We can store the tail here as well, it's too risky to keep carrying everything back and forth. And after the duel it'll be weird for me to continuously carry around a scabbard and a sword separately."

Astrid chewed on his wordsâ€¦at least he had thought it through, and very rarely did anyone wander this deep into the forest on a routine level.

"Alrightâ€¦we'll head back to the palace, and carrying everything here. I'll pick up some dinner as well, since I doubt we'll be heading back from the cove before dinner is finished." Hiccup only smiled at her words, and packed away his dagger and spare knife, already running ahead.

He was happy, Astrid smiled.

0o0

Get a wagon and fetch dinner, was Astrid's orders via the prince while he stayed and tweaked the last few screws in the rigging system. He was locked in his smithy and Arte was cleaning up in his room so he was safe, Astrid let out a breath.

She went out to the shed out back and found a few maids hanging up clothes outside.

"Are you going to the duel tomorrow?" One of the woman asked.

"Oh, of course," another cackled. "Why miss such rich entertainment? That weakling prince just keeps pushing his luck."

Alastair glared, none of the women had realized she was there as she walked quietly into the shed behind them, searching for an appropriately sized wagon.

"Did you hear that the prince and that servant warrior have been training every day all week? He's even using that sword he got as a gift from the one of the high islands."

Man, word sure did travel around there. Astrid almost smirked, probably Arte's doing.

"What a waste of a good sword."

"And a good warrior. Alastair's kin to Atlas Hofferson, and his talents are being wasted by pitying that hopeless prince."

She felt her blood boil.

Astrid grabbed a wagon and made no effort to be quiet, coming out of the shed with a tight narrow squint to her eyes and all the women gasped, a few dropped the damp clothes to the ground.

"Warrior Alastair." They all said in unison.

She only regarded them with a frown, not even giving them the time of

day to tell then which way was up.

She heard the desperate whispers behind her.

"He really is loyal to the prince!"

"Such a shame he had some much going for him!"

0o0

Astrid entered the room, glad to not have heard too much more gossip in the kitchens as well as in her halls on her way back.

She had some dry food, easy to eat later if needed, and Hiccup peaked out of the smithy, asking her to come in with the wagon even though Arte still cleaned.

"Such heavy labor so close to the evening?" Arte asked, never taking her eyes off of her cleaning.

"Such curiosity for something that's none of your business?" Hiccup opened the door fully as Astrid wheeled in the wagon to the forge. "We have some last minute training to do if you must know." Hiccup ran his finger over his side desk. "And you might wanna hit my desk again, it's dusty."

He closed the door behind them, the room especially dark without the extra light provided by the room.

"How is it looking?" Astrid asked, looking as Hiccup folded the metal at its connecting points and placing it, a saddle, and the tail inside the wagon.

When had he had the time to do all this?

"Prince Hiccup, you made a saddle?" Astrid asked, cocking her hip a bit. Hiccup didn't make eye contact as he got a slab of wool to cover the wagon's contents.

"I might've gotten up in the middle of a few nights to work on a few things."

Astrid's jaw dropped. She must've been more exhausted than she realized if she had slept through him hammering away in his forge in the middle of the night while she was sleeping that whole week. She needed to perhaps keep her door open? But she had reasons for keeping it closed as she slept, of course.

Still!

She punched Hiccup in the side of his arm, wanting to jab harder but not wanting to risk hurting his arm badly right before a sword duel.

"You reckless little-!" Astrid almost screamed. "Prince Hiccup," she lowered her voice to a hiss. "You need to get your rest, you have to be in top condition for the duel tomorrow."

"I know, I know! I've been sleeping enough. I just don't need as much rest as you." He tried to smile but Astrid wasn't playing

along.

"I want you to suâ€" "

"Succeed, I know, I know." Hiccup's shoulders fell. "I'm sorry, alright? Let's just go get this to Toothless to try it on."

Astrid sighed and opened the door, her and Hiccup slipping out despite Arte's glares or anyone else's for that matter. Hiccup looked over at her with question as she was sure he heard whispers of not only his nameâ€|but "Alastair's pity".

Meeting with Toothless was a little more in chipper spirits. Toothless ran up almost giddily to Hiccup and he petted the dragon all the same as he always had. Astrid smiled despite her still being a little pissed at him. She was almost tempted to go and be with those twoâ€|they looked rather cozy now that they had gotten past whatever hurtle they needed to.

Hiccup quickly connected the tail to the rigging system, the stirrup to the saddle, it was quite the complicated system. Even Astrid wondered if he could pull it off. Though she was reminded of his quick tact and deft that morning while he was practicing fighting with his dagger. It impressed her, to say the least.

Hiccup ran over to her then, going to the wagon and pulling out yet another item she was unaware of him making. A vest of sorts that he slipped on with two dangling connectors at the waist. She corked a brow.

"Prince Hiccupâ€| She sighed. That boy had everythingâ€|

"What? I can't count how many times you nagged me about falling off Toothless, so, now I don't have to worry about that." He slipped the vest on the rest of the way, tugging at the connectors. "See? They connect to the saddle so even if I get dislodged I won't fall off." He looked up to the skyâ€|sparkles of wonder in them "Which will come in handy when we get higher up."

Astrid shook her head at how romanced he had become with flight. The thought of the actual deal, while silently fueling his actions, wasn't at the forefront due to his affair with the sky.

"Can I borrow some paper and a charcoal stick?" He asked as he hooked everything up. Astrid grabbed a piece only to have Hiccup rip it in half and give the other half back to her. She frowned.

"I only need a little," he said. "I've gotta document the positions."

Astrid's frown deepened as she looked up at the sun. It was barely visible behind the trees anymore. Dusk was upon them as the sky shown of purples and reds. "Flying wasn't part of the plan, Prince Hiccup." Astrid nagged, "I thought you said that you were just 'trying it on'?"

"Oh come on, Alastairâ€|just a quick test."

Quick test? Yeah right. Astrid watched as Hiccup messed around with the controls flipping the stirrup until the tail was out and

Toothless and the prince were up in the air yet again. She wondered how long it would take for them to fallâ€|?

A loud splashâ€|.

Not too long.

Astrid got up and walked over to the lake's edge, looking dully into the water. Toothless dragged Hiccup out with his claws and nudged at Hiccup's side to get him up. Hiccup smiled at the dragon and coughed slightly.

"You might wanna try something different." Astrid offered.

"Hm, like what?" Hiccup kneeled down beside her, Toothless coming up as well. Astrid immediately closed up a bit with Toothless so near, pulling her knees up to her chest.

"Maybe tie a rope to something and figure out the positions while you floatâ€|?"

Hiccup blinked a few times and looked at Toothless, the dragon nodded a bit, running off.

"Um, he didn't like that idea?"

"No, I told him to go get some vines from the tree over there." Hiccup stood and rustled through the wagon. "I didn't bring a role long enough so we'll need a little extra." As he dropped the rope as he drew a picture of the first position of the tail.

"Positionâ€|one." He said to himself.

"How many positions are there?"

"I rigged for six, but I may need to add some more or take some out depending on how Toothless flies." He walked off, going over to Toothless who brought him three extra vines. "Come on Alastair!" He called out. "We're going up to the cliffs over thereâ€|we'll give you a lift."

Aâ€|lift? On Toothless?

"I'llâ€|uhâ€|I'll meet you there. Go on ahead." There was no way in Hel she'd ride on a dragon.

OoO

It took her a bit of time to climb back up the cliff and make it through the forest to the cliffs they had flown to. The sun was barely peaking over the horizon and half the sky was already twinkling in inky darkness. It was much too late for them to be out, and their dinner was left back in the wagon. But she really didn't have to make it all the way there to the cliffs for as soon as she heard a crash, she rushed over and realizedâ€|the prince and his dragon had crashed into a nearby tree.

"Prince Hiccup!" She ran over, both of them were hopelessly tangled in the rigging. Astrid pulled at Hiccup's leg and tugged him forward, but he'd only budge but so much. "What's wrong?"

"I think I made the slip on the connectors too narrowâ€|it's lodged in there pretty good." Hiccup tried to stand, but fell over a bit as Toothless stepped forward with him. "Looks like we're really close friends, now, huh Toothless?" Hiccup tried to laugh it off, but Astrid was two seconds from freaking out.

"H-Hiccup!" She raised her voice. "You are attached to Toothless! And you're laughing about this!?"

"Wellâ€|it is kinda funny." Hiccup laughed once more before frowning. He tugged at the connectors a little more desperately. "Okayâ€|I need to get someâ€|some pliers, from my smithy."

Astrid pressed a palm to her forehead. "You didn't bring one with you?" He shook his head. "Greatâ€|so I'm guessing I'm going to have to get it?"

"Well I would but, I've gained some extra pounds."

Astrid sighed. She did remember seeing some pliers up on the wall of his forge last night. She turned to them. "Go back to the cove as best you can and start eating the dinner in the wagon, I'll be back as soon as I can." Astrid looked down before taking a few steps towards Hiccup, looking him in the eye was always weird for her, but she felt the need to get the point across clear and firm. Her mind was too cluttered with what happened the last time she left him alone.

"Please stay out of trouble while I'm gone."

He smiled.

"I'm serious, Prince Hiccup." Astrid wasn't smiling. "It'll be night when I get back. You and Toothless stay low and no more flying after you get to the cove."

"Yes momâ€|" Hiccup muttered and she smacked his arm before walking away.

She practically ran through the forest, praying to Odin that everything would be good until she got back.

Glad that Arte wasn't in the room while she ripped the pliers and another useful looking tool from the wall, stuffed it in her belt and ran back out she was stopped by what she thought was a pole and toppled to the ground.

"Ah, it's Hiccup's girlfriend." The 'pole' spoke and Astrid scowled up at the realization that Snotlout's body must've been as hard as his head. And there he went again with the girlfriend commentâ€|

"Out of the way, Snotlout, I'm in a hurry." Hadis was there as well, the two off to dinner or to the lounging area, no doubt.

"Going back to lick the prince's boots?" He laughed a bit and the same fire that burned when she heard the laundry maids speaking ill of Hiccup came back. He was just soâ€|cocky.

"I'll leave that to you tomorrow after Prince Hiccup beats you." She

spoke without thinking. She probably shouldn't be talking Hiccup up so much as she wasn't completely confident he'd win. But anything to shut that fool up.

Snotlout shook his head. "Alastair, it really is such a shame to see you go this way. Pledging loyalty to some useless prince. Atlas wouldn't be impressed."

Atlasâ€|

Astrid stepped backwards a bit, feeling punched in the stomach yet again. That pang returned every time she was reminded of her slow but steady betrayal to her brotherâ€|the reason she was really there. All marred by Hiccup.

"There are more important thingsâ€|" She rested on, though her strained voice wasn't very convincing.

"I just wish I knew what was so special to make such a bright boy like you steep so low. Did he offer you something valuable? Bribe you with women?" Oh, how she wanted to punch him right in his snotface.

"The prince has done no such thing." Astrid turned her heel. She'd rather go the long way outside the palace than stand around getting worked up over Snotlout again.

Hadis and Snotlout snickered as Astrid walked away, she heard their faint whispers as thought it was second nature. She had been hearing whispers all week, and they rang as loudly as yells in her mind.

"Man, this is gonna be a riot," Hadis laughed a bit. "And with the King coming back soon, it won't be too long before you can finally be the proper heir."

"It'll take a bit of convincing," Snotlout replied. "But this duel came at a good time, once I win that'll probably be all the convincing I need to do to Uncle Stoick to revoke Hiccup's birthrightâ€|"

Astrid made a squeak, covering her mouth quietly as she realized she had stopped walking in an attempt to listen. She looked over her shoulder and found Snotlout smirking back at her, there was a demon in his eyes, and, again, it made her want to punch him.

0o0

Making a mad dash back into the forestâ€"Snotlout and Hadis' conversation, about how certain Snotlout was that he was going to beat Hiccup, and about how he'd use that to convince King Stoick to revoke Hiccup's birthright to inherit the throne and give it to him insteadâ€"throbbed within her.

She ran faster, needing to tell Hiccup. Maybe it would be the boost he needed to finally focus.

Once she returned to the cove she found Hiccup sitting against Toothless by the lake. He took a few bites of his food while he fished from the lake, every time he got a bite he'd give the fish to

Toothless who ate it happily.

It was still the strangest thing, watching those two. But Astrid had to stop and stare every time. A goofy smile on her face as she saw the prince fit in better with a wild dragon than anyone else in his own culture.

She felt almost out of place running up to tell him of Snotlout's conversation. Wishing he could just fly away on Toothless's she knew he didn't belong there. And even though she desperately wanted to believe she was destined for things beyond the shores of Berk, Astrid simply didn't think she was.

What was she? Some maiden who hated being a wife? Some crazy girl passing off a male? Some traitor to her own family? Some odd accessory to Prince Hiccup's crime?

"Oh, hey Alastair." Hiccup turned to wave at her, Toothless still chomping on some fish. "I would come to you but I'm still connected to a dragon, here." He laughed.

Astrid shook her head and went over to the lake, handing him the pliers and the other tool she had brought.

"Great, so as soon as I finish eating we won't be a unit anymore, 'kay Toothless?" He smiled at the dragon and the night fury licked his chops as he still ate, but Hiccup cracked up laughing again. The dragon must've said something funny!

Did dragons even have a sense of humor? Astrid wondered, but she couldn't bring herself to ask such elementary questions. Instead she pulled her knees up to her chin, watching the fish Hiccup pulled out make ripples in the water. The reflection of the moon wiggling humorously.

"You're awfully quiet," Hiccup noted without looking at her. "Even Toothless thinks it's weird."

"Does he, now?" Astrid pulled her knees up closer.

"Did something happen when you went back?" Hiccup asked, wrapping the line to the fishing rod, Toothless having a good pile of fish to finish. Astrid's back straightened at the mention of Hiccup's question.

"I guess something did happen," Hiccup said, her reaction probably a dead giveaway. He reached for the pliers, and began to pry at the connectors, still not looking at her while he spoke. "You gonna tell me about it?" He continued. "Was it Arte? Snotlout?"

Her back straightened again, against her will.

Hiccup cut his gaze over to her before returning to his work. "So, it was Snotlout? Let me guess, he was bragging about how he's going to beat me tomorrow?"

Astrid nodded, growing too used to him simply knowing her reactions as a proper response.

"Well there's no reason to get so bent out of shape about that. Isn't

him being a cocky jerk expected?" His voice and his grip on the pliers slipped, the tool falling to the ground as Toothless picked it up and handed it back to Hiccup.

Astrid only clamped up more. She really didn't want to tell him exactly what he was fearing.

"Butâ€|there's something else, isn't there?" He asked her again with a sigh when Astrid continued to be silent. "What else did he say, Alastair?"

"Thatâ€|" Astrid finally spoke up, but she trailed. Her voice was so small, so girly. She had to check herself before she continued, clearing her throat to deepen it. "That 'once he wins' he's going to use his victory over you to persuade the king to revoke your birthright." It all came out in one tangled breath, she bit her lip once it was finished, looking hesitantly over at Hiccup as his hand stopped working on disconnecting him and Toothless.

The night fury nudged at him but Hiccup kept his gaze downcast, his bangs falling over his eyes so Astrid couldn't see them. She leaned over to him on impulse, reaching out a hand but Toothless growled at her, probably thinking she caused the pain.

But thenâ€|she did.

"I'm sorry," she choked out.

"Don't be." Hiccup said and stood. Taking the pliers firm in hand and broke the connector in one swift motion. Astrid saw his hand shaking, the veins in his slim hands almost popping out. There was a dark shadow over his face and he stood, giving Toothless a gentle pet behind his ear before turning to face her, yet not directly making eye contact.

"Let's goâ€|" he said drolly.

"Are you sure you're alright, Prince Hiccup?" Astrid asked, feeling, for once, like his mother and not being annoyed by it.

"Yeah," he answered simply. "I just need to go home and get some rest. I've got a big day tomorrowâ€|"

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He kept that quiet and focused demeanor for the rest of the night. Silent as they left the cove and stored the flying gear in the hallow tree Hiccup had suggested. Still silent as they walked back home, and not even bothering to snip at Arte's baits as he dressed for bed and placed his dagger right at his bedside.

"Good night Prince Hiccup." Astrid said quietly, blowing out his last candle.

"Alastair," he said as she headed for her own quarters. She looked back into the darkness.

"Yes, Prince Hiccup?"

"What did you say to Snotloutâ€|about what he said?"

It was an odd question to ask in his dark room seconds before bed, but Astrid sighed and answered.

"I told him that there were more important things!" She said, leaving it simply at that before closing the door behind her, the weight of the day denting her shoulders as she slept.

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Hiccup was nowhere to be found when Astrid woke up, a quick note left at his bed that he had gone off to train and eat breakfast alone. Astrid crumpled the paper, thinking it would be just her luck to have something to happen to him when she wasn't there, but before she even had a chance to look for him, the crowd already began to mill around the Kill Ring, she made her way there, already seeing Snotlout.

She looked for Hiccup in the milling of the quickly growing crowd and found him rather easily. Not too hard to find a skinny boy amidst a crowd of brawns.

He had his helmet on, and was holding his sword, and Astrid twitched a brow. What in Odin's name was he thinking of doing with a sword? She hoped that he hadn't gone so off the deep end with learning about Snotlout's intentions that he wanted to beat him with a sword as opposed to his dagger.

Still, she tapped his shoulder and Hiccup practically jumped out of his own skin.

"Alastair!" he sighed. "Don't scare me like that." She saw the grip on the top of his sword tighten and immediately she reached down and covered his hand. Hiccup flinched again as she uncapped his shaking palms before letting go.

"Be calm, My Prince." She said softly, close enough to him so that she could use a smaller voice.

"I know, I know, remember the lessons, don't let Snotlout intimidate me!" He rambled on, though it was hard to get passed his chattering teeth.

"And be calm." She stressed again, grabbing his shoulders urgently and turning him to face her. She kept shaking him as she spoke. "You're not going to win if you're nervous. Conjure up every reason you want to win. Your pride, your birthright, for all the other Hiccups in your family, for Toothless, everything!"

He was silent for a bit, staring blankly forward at Snotlout right across the sparring arena. Astrid followed his gaze he had so many girls, so many friends, so many people all wishing him luck. Hiccup looked back over his shoulder at meet her eyes, the loneliness in them almost pained her. All he had was her there cheering him on.

"For you too!" He said quietly.

"What?" Astrid asked.

"I'm doing it for you too, you know." He smiled but there was a

sadness mixing with his gratitude. "You've stood up for me this whole time, I won't let all your talk be an embarrassment to you."

Astrid felt a pluck at her chest. He would fight for his pride, his rights, for Toothless, yesâ€¦but for her as well. Orâ€¦at least for the Alastair half of her. She looked down at his hand, it was still shaking a bit, and she took it again, bringing it up in front of both their faces and squeezing it tightly, Hiccup took a moment to adjust, but eventually gave in, and squeezed her hand back with a wry smile.

"Go kick his butt for me." She said tartly.

"Will do."

"Hey Your Princeliness!" She heard Snotlout's voice call out. "Come and get it!"

Hiccup's eyes narrowed and he pulled his sword from the sheath, giving one last look towards her before walking out to the Kill Ring.

She had done all she couldâ€¦

0o0

Hiccup went out into the arena, feeling like the sun was extra merciless that day, a heat sweat adding to his nervous sweat was already making the metal of his helmet smell but he kept a grip on his sword.

Alastair hadn't asked him why he had his sword but he knew that coming out with a dagger in hand was guaranteed to get him laughed out of the arena at first step. Still, he kept his dagger tucked away in a wrist pouch he'd placed under his arm guard. Hopefully Hiccup could go without it, but after hearing Snotlout's post-duel plans Hiccup took a bit more drastic measures. It was dirty play, to hide a dagger, but Hiccup was sure Snotlout would do it in a heartbeatâ€"if he didn't already have one on him as wellâ€"too.

Vikings had no dueling etiquette, it was a bloody match of choice, in which the winner had the loser at their complete mercy and could either choose to spare them or kill them. Hiccup swallowed at the very thought of losing, not confident on whether Snotlout would really finish the job or not. Snotlout having him completely out of the question would help with his "plan" to woe his father., after all.

His blood boiled a bit. When Alastair had told him about what Snotlout had said it gave him an odd twinge. He had a hard time devoting total time an energy in the duel when around Toothless. Alastair had always told him he had a 'higher calling' and that he was better than the Viking society, but Hiccup couldn't stomach not inheriting the throne. Not getting back at all those who said he couldn't do it, not showing the entire Viking culture what he was made of. After-allâ€¦it was his birthright. Yet being around Toothless wasâ€¦distracting, though there was something more when he was around the dragon.

A Viking King who not only was a hiccup, but ended the war between

dragons and Vikings. The Gods had given him that gift to hear dragons thoughts for a reason, and he intended to use it. But he had goofed off, thought he could skip sleep, only practiced his forms during lessons with Alastair, but now he needed to focus. Every odd was against him, and to even keep his rights he had to beat his cousinâ€|.

Snotlout walked into the arena as well, smug and confident as ever. He had his cheerleaders but Hiccup gave one last look back at his own cheering section.

Alastair's hands were clasped together, apprehension in his eyes. Hiccup almost chuckled at how much of a mother Alastair looked like. Still, knowing he had someone rooting for his success despite losing respect for it was freeing in many ways. He took a deep breath and brought his attention back to Snotlout.

"You know the rules." Snotlout licked his lips.

"There are no rules." Hiccup muttered, shaking hands putting his sword in front of him.

"Except try not to cry after I beat you." Snotlout sniffled and took his stance, looking down at Hiccup's grip. "Ha, cursed handâ€|this fight will be over quickly." The referee banged the drum and off the duel went.

Hiccup faintly heard Alastair calling compliments out to him, but his heart pounded in his ears as the drum bang, everything was spinning as he saw Snotlout lung his sword towards him, he cut around it, barely missing getting jabbed, but on first strike the sword sliced through his shirt, leaving a line of blood on his arm.

Hiccup would've kicked himself if he could. Two seconds into the fight and he was already cut. Snotlout's laughs, and his fan's cheers rang even more in Hiccup's mind. His wrist seemed too stiff to make a formidable strike. Dodging and curving around the blade was his mode of dueling, something that gave him boo's and laughs. But they all registered as ringing.

Snotlout took another jab, and Hiccup locked his blade with and underhanded block, his wrist twisted while the dagger that lay beneath his arm guard stiffened his movement a bit, but he pushed through it. Snotlout's resistance was strong and he could feel the lock on his blade slipping.

What parts of his body were open? Hiccup thought quickly, his brain adjusting to the adrenaline and finally thinking of Alastair's suggestions during lessons. If he lost his lock on Snotlout, he could go for his stomach or his legs. Hiccup used the weight of Snotlout's push and lunged himself back a bit, and, of course, Snotlout came charging. He blocked every blow, each time metal hit metal, and the pound left his teeth over sensitive and chattering within him.

He had to make some strikes if he was going to leave the duel with any dignity, Hiccup thought. But Snotlout wasn't as forgiving as Alastair in lessons. And a sword was so harder to maneuver than a dagger. Without realizing, Hiccup missed a block and the sword whipped right passed his nose, taking off a thin layer of skin and even a few hair strands from his bangs fell in front of his eye, he

gasped, and Snotlout simply laughed again, another roar of praises to Snotlout rumbling through Hiccup's body.

His brain pounded with his heart as he looked for good places to strike. Know your target, Alastair would say. Snotlout kept his stomach guarded, his legs always moving, his arms always in a good movement with his sword. Everything checked off, he certainly was more skilled in proper form than him. There were small areas of open, but nothing Hiccup could get at with a sword.

He twisted around Snotlout's blade again, going directly behind him and trying to swing his sword around and maybe catch him off guard, but he was met with similar results as anything else. Blade met blade again, and more cheers from the crowd.

His hands began to shake again as he began to feel the watery blood on his nose leaking down to his lips, trying to get out of his mind that he was tasting his own failure.

Noâ€|Hiccup told himself. None of that talk. He couldn't afford losing the battle, if he did he might as well just be dead.

He tried so hard to remember Alastair's words, every word he had told him about dueling, about being calm, about conjuring up all of his motivations and releasing them through his weapon. He took a wild jab forward, barely missing Snotlout's lower arm, but at least he almost made contact. Another wild stab in the dark, not even trying to have proper form and not caring how desperate he looked at that point. A gangling little prince taking wild jabs at his dueling opponent was probably enough to entertain anyone, but, again, he couldn't think like that. It was win or dieâ€|those were the only options.

"Just give it up." Snotlout breathed out, blocking all of Hiccup's rogue strikes like it was all child's play. They locked blades again, and Snotlout smirked. "The crowd can see you're just desperate nowâ€|."

Hiccup's eyes widened, the words came as no surprise, but for some reason they still left a dent in his stomach, and push in his ribs. They lunged back and ran at each other again, blade hitting blade every few seconds, wild circles, metal, blood, and sweat circulating everything. Hiccup only saw spinning at that point, but he kept lodging anyways, letting out sorting groans as he did so.

"Getting angry?" Snotlout breathed out a laugh. Hiccup willed himself not to listen, it was just bait, but his ears opened to it, and all the crowds hecklings ran through his listening range. He missed the pound of his heartbeat compared to hearing all the discomforts of the crowds cheers in favor of Snotlout, and all the insults directed towards him.

His legs buckled as he ran towards Snotlout again, sword first, and took one swing as his legs gave out. Snotlout gave a round of his blade, bringing it back and almost twisting Hiccup's wrists back before he felt his grip slip completely. He let out a million curses in his mind as his hands felt naked without the sword in them. Naked and surely dead.

He lost his footing on burnt out legs, falling forward and meeting straight with Snotlout's blade.

Defining momentâ€|face to face with his cousin's blade. His own sword too far away for him to make a run for it without getting stabbed. He looked up at his cousin, nose still bleeding, arm still bleeding, helmet askew, and eyebrows knitted tightly together. Almost daring Snotlout to just finish him.

"Finish him off!"

"Put Berk out of it's misery!"

The crowd yelled. And yet among them was one encouraging scream.

"Don't listen to them, Prince Hiccup, you know what to do now, I know you can do it!"

Hiccup felt the stiffness under his arm guard, His dagger was still there. Being at that angle, Hiccup began to see all the openings he could go for, and smiled a bit.

"Can't make up your mind, Snotlout?" Hiccup probed and Snotlout looked caught off guard with the question. "Allow me to make it for you," Hiccup took the dagger from his guard and took a knee up off the ground, running past Snotlout and slicing him with the dagger. The contact of skin to blade, make his stomach churn, though, eerily reminding him of his first encounter with Toothless. He swallowed. He couldn't get soft now, he had to follow through, just this onceâ€|

Snotlout looked at his cut shoulder, the crowd growing even more silent at a loss for words, before he saw the wild fire burn in Snotlout's eyes. Being embarrassed wasn't something Snotlout knew how to handle, and he ran towards him, sword ready to swing before Hiccup locked it against with his dagger, unlocking it and moving his wrist down quickly around to get one of the smaller openings, jabbing at his shoulder.

His dagger went in a deeper than he thought, and Snotlout let out a scream, rearing back. Hiccup removed the dagger quickly, and stepped back as well. Snotlout's arm dangled a bit and he dropped to his kneesâ€|the fire in his eyes burning like hel but his panted in exhausting. He stood again, running towards Hiccup but his grip was sloppy, the shoulder Hiccup had punctured bleeding heavily. Hiccup turned around the blade, a few strands of hair falling again, but he took a sly step, coming right up to Snotlout back accidentally and throwing caution to the wind, he turned the dagger at its side, the flat end of the dagger against his injured shoulder, The bone felt tender, and Snotlout let out a hiss of pain while Hiccup took the opportunity to knock him to lock an arm around his neck and hold the dagger against the thick flesh. Snotlout gagged a bit as Hiccup held on so tightly it was making him light headed, but he knew any loosen a grip and Snotlout would break away in a heartbeat.

The crowd went completely silent. The odds were in Hiccup's favor, and now he had the choice.

Snotlout panted, Hiccup could feel the anger pouring out of him, and sweat collected against his arm as Snotlout's anger intensified.

"Can'tâ€|" Snotlout choked. "Makeâ€|up your mindâ€|Prince Hiccup?"

Hiccup breathed out. The thought of slitting Snotlout's neck didn't appealed to him, not even then. He deicdedâ€|killing wasn't how he would want this to end.

He tightened his grip, turning to Snotlout. The confidence he felt boiled a fire within him. He stood proud and tall, the sun on his back hot and thriving. "I won't be made a fool by you anymoreâ€|" he told Snotlout. "And I won't let you take my birthright. I suggest you keep being a warrior duke and learn your place towards your superior."

And with that, Hiccup let go of his cousin, and he dropped down on his knees, gripping his injured shoulder.

Hiccup went up and grabbed his shoved aside sword, and placed his dagger back in the wrist pouch.

The crowd was still silent as Hiccup walked away, and he went right up to Alastair, not knowing whether to smile or wait for a response. Alastair's eyes were wide, but he looked proud.

He just stood before him, not knowing what to say or do either. Together they just fell in stride, walking back to the palace as the crowd thinned out to let them pass.

And if Hiccup finally telling Snotlout to learn his place and beating him at a duel wasn't good enough, the look he saw on Arte's face in the crowd was enough to make him smile.

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Alastair took Hiccup back to his room, sitting him on his bed while he went out to get some medical supplies. Hiccup took off his shirt, and sighed, removing the wrist pouch and leaning back on the bed. The raw pain and his aching muscles finally settling in. All the blood felt like it was rushing to his cuts, his head pounded and his arm throbbed. Butâ€|he had won.

Hiccup still laid on his bed, a immovable smile plastered across his lips when Alastair returned. There was the still a thick silence as Alastair cleaned off the cut on Hiccup's arm, but Hiccup's smile remained.

"I'm glad you're happy." Alastair finally said, cutting through the first thicket of silence. Hiccup still didn't answer right away though. "You _are_happy, right?" Alastair cut a little deeper in the silence.

"I am." Hiccup said, yet it wasn't as enthusiastic as his tongue prepared. He hissed while Alastair pressed at his cut with a hot towel and looked up at him, Alastair bit his lip, a million thoughts running across his eyes.

"I hope you can handle all the attention you're going to getâ€|" Alastair said, instead of asking all the questions Hiccup anticipated. He chewed on the words. The Kill Ring was silent as he

left, only the steps of people going to assist Snotlout pattering. But people were swingers. Going to whichever side benefitted them, whichever side was on the good edge of the things. No one ever wanted to be the one who stuck up for the losing sideâ€|except for Alastair, of course.

"Thank you." Hiccup said, disregarding Alastair's other statement.

"You're welcome." Alastair answered instead of the anticipated 'for what?' "Lesson number one, right?" Alastair smiled, finishing up on bandaging Hiccup's arm and taking the hot towel again to move to Hiccup's nose.

"Yeahâ€|" Hiccup laughed a bit, though swallowed when Alastair leaned over him, and scrubbed at his nose with the hot towel. He hissed again, but didn't squirm.

"You lodged him pretty deep in his shoulderâ€|" Alastair said. "Snotlout probably won't be able to use it for a while."

Hiccup frowned. He remembered how unsettling it was just jabbing at Toothless when they first met, hearing the dragon in the hall that night get stabbed and carried off. But there was nothing worse than feeling the blade of his dagger sink into Snotlout's shoulder, one wrong move could sever something, drag right through to the other sideâ€|it made him want to yak, but his stomach settled when he looked up at Alastair smiling at him.

"Stillâ€|I'm proud of you." Alastair reminded him, dabbing his nose with an herb, it stung and Hiccup hissed again.

"Geez, Alastairâ€|" Hiccup's nose burned at that point, and he could feel the chai of it sinking into his taste.

"Stop being a baby, the cut on your nose isn't bad, I put a remedy on it to protect it for a few hours and help it close up."

"You just know how to do everything, don't you? You're like a warrior and a mother all wrapped up in one." Hiccup laughed, but Alastair simply closed up the medical supplies. He never really took too much favor to being called a mother, but Hiccup couldn't really help but feel more like he had a parental figure following him around than a warrior at that point.

He leaned back against the pillows, letting out a sigh of relief and his smile returned. He felt sore yet empowered and even though all his body told him to do was rest his mind was reeling for feeling the high of exhilaration.

Alastair stood, putting his gloves back on and Hiccup sat up, lifting a brow.

"Where are you going?" He asked.

"We're going to see Toothless now, right?" Alastair asked nonchalantly, tinkering with the ending threads of his gloves. Hiccup's lips curved more upward and jumped up and headed for the door, going outside, before Alastair called him back in.

"Your shirt," Alastair reminded him, throwing his tunic over to him that he had ran out and forget he wasn't wearing.

"Oh," Hiccup blushed. "Right."

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The evening was young but dark shadows began to paint the forest as Hiccup and Alastair made their ways to the cove after gathering the flying apparatus from the hollow tree.

Hiccup couldn't help but smile at how Alastair knew he was going to go see Toothless. Though it was beginning to get dark out, Hiccup couldn't pass up a celebratory flight. And Toothless probably wouldn't think he was such a weakling if he knew he'd won a duel.

'Toothless!' Hiccup called out once reaching the bottom of the cove, both in mind and audibly. Toothless rested underneath the shade of the tree, blinking an eye open when he heard Hiccup coming. Hiccup could still tell that the name Toothless gave him a slight annoyance, but it was growing on him, that was for sure. And he would answer to it, now, with no hesitation.

_:::Your mood is better than last night,::_Toothless noted, seeming calmed by that fact, himself.

_:::Wellâ€|I won the duel!:::_Hiccup could barely stop smiling, trying to seem stronger than like a little boy excited by an accomplishment, but there was really no tricking a dragon who could read his mind.

Instead, Toothless just gave his congratulations, and nudged against his arm. It was tentative, the shows of affections, but despite the ability, Hiccup had to remind himself that Toothless was still a dragonâ€|an animal. Animals didn't smile proudly at their friends, or give them a slap on the back. They touched, the nuzzled, and even though so much contact was always unsettling to Hiccup with just about everyone, it was simply something that would help their bond grow stronger.

He could only laugh to himself again, not knowing any other human that had to deal with such thoughts. Still, that boost of confidence still pulsed through him, and Toothless seemed to sense it.

_:::You think that I'll consider you stronger because of this?:::_The night fury asked. When Hiccup had first mentioned his duel, Toothless had a strong doubt in his mind, though of course the kinds of 'duels' Toothless was probably used to were more or less tooth-and-nail to the death kind of battles. But the question wasn't really a mock, it was more of a true question.

Hiccup swallowed. _:::Well, I guess I had a hope you would. I know you still think I'm just a weakling.::_

Toothless was silent, his mind too quiet for Hiccup to read.

_:::Butâ€|:: _Hiccup just continued. __ I'm glad I got to prove myself, not just to you but to a lot of people. I'm not sure how

things will turn out, but at least people know what I'm capable ofâ€|::: His mind trailed off as he communicated, and Toothless sat, listening intently.

_:::Your heart is strong,::_Toothless chose to say after a few moments of silence. Hiccup's eyes widened. His heartâ€|? He supposed that was a dragon's form a compliment, for he didn't feel any spite in the comment itself. He pet Toothless head gently and smiled.

_:::So, how about we go flying?:::_Hiccup asked, already pulling out the rigs.

_:::As long as we don't spend the night attached again.:::_Toothless snuffed.

:::Oh, come on, it wasn't that bad.:::

_:::It was when your friend put you through such horrible thoughts.:::_Toothless turned while Hiccup attached the saddle and rigging, but he paused when he realized the nature of what Toothless was saying. He remembered when Alastair told him of Snotlout's plans, how Toothless growled at him when Alastair reached for him. He was too bogged down in his own self pity to really pay attention to what Toothless was thinking, but he knew that if depressing thoughts were so turbulent in his own mind, what must it have been like for Toothless.

_:::I'm sorry,:::_Hiccup felt it right to apologize. _:::I didn't realize that me being depressed had an effect on you too.:::_

_:::In many ways we're just one mind in two different bodies.:::_Toothless added. _:::But the bodily difference is a wide chasm.:::_

_:::More dragon philosophyâ€|:::_Hiccup thought more than he tried to communicate to Toothless, though he knew the night fury heard it anyways. It was getting easier to decipher Toothless's thoughts into a dialect he could understand. Going by hearing other dragons, their words and sentences were choppy, elementary. And although Toothless's intelligence was always a one up from the other's the more they spoke, the easier it was to create their own language that fit them both.

Hiccup finished the rigging, checking to make sure the connectors were at least secure. He hadn't had time to really fix the problem with the connectors since he went straight to bed the previous night, the connectors were loose, but he wanted to fly. He'd deal with a problem if one should arise if it arose.

The sun was sipping lower and lower, and Hiccup knew a good half hour of flying was probably all they could squeeze in before he had to head back to the palace. But as long as he got his flyer's high out of the way, it was fine.

He mounted Toothless and looked back at Alastair, who quietly watched them at a careful distance by the pond.

"Alrightâ€|position four." Hiccup muttered to himself as they took off, willing himself to work with Toothless long enough so that they at least wouldn't fall.

The wind whipped through his hair and nose as usual, though the wind washing in his ears and lips was beginning to become a common state for him. They leveled just over the trees and he switched gears, gliding gently over the tree tops. The wind wasn't too violent, and it was easy enough to just ride the current.

:::We're doing much better.:::Toothless noted as well, a little flip of joy in his words. Hiccup could feel him holding back, trying not to seem too excited, though he knew that for Toothlessâ€"or any dragon for that matterâ€"flying after being on the ground so long was probably more freeing thanâ€|Hiccup defeating his cousin.

They had been so focused on practicing, they hadn't really flown. Toothless probably flew all through the clouds, over the water, higher than the stars when he was free. A pang of guilt went through Hiccup, and he looked up at the clouds, lit at the bottom yet being bathed in night over top, he knew all the positions, and their bond was getting stronger, it probably wouldn't be too much of a disaster to at least try an actually fly that didn't involve step by step easiness.

_:::Do you think we're ready for that?::_Toothless asked, referring to Hiccup's want to go into the clouds.

:::We'll never know until we try, and all this easy gliding must be boring for you, right?::

Toothless mulled over the thought a bit, but Hiccup could already feel the longing within him to fly as he used to. It was still a bother for Toothless, having to rely on Hiccup to fly, being grounded until he could get to the cove, being a pawn in Hiccup's little plan to end the war. The dragon's engraved pride was crumbling, leaving him feeling like a tool rather than a free agent.

Hiccup frowned tightly before looking up into the clouds, still being covered in the night but he switched to the third position.

He felt a gust whack his neck and he immediately closed his mouth as they reared upwards. Hiccup dug his palms into the reins of the saddle, and made sure his legs were secure while they hoisted. It was a workout to say the least. He had to keep his legs bent, his bottom elevated from the saddle as he couldn't just sit, but Toothless's wings seemed to flap in a strong rip while elevating. The wind called to him, and Toothless's tongue wagged out in a high of finally getting that breeze of flight flowing back through his nostrils.

Hiccup felt it too, it was newer, to feel it through himself yet through Toothless at the same time. He switched back to the first position and they leveled out, gliding over the currents. They were more turbulent higher up, a flow that went up and down and the jostling made it hard for Hiccup to get his stomach to levelâ€|

_:::A weightless gut is commonâ€|::_Toothless mentioned, cutting his eyes up to Hiccup while he swerved a bit.

_:::Thanks for the update::: _Hiccup's throat expanded before shrinking again, his stomachâ€"as Toothless saidâ€"did feel weightless, like it was just hovering in him and it wouldn't stay in place until they

were down on the ground. Hiccup looked downâ€œ|the ground was so far down, a little too far down. He gulped but decided to stare forward instead.

They almost leveled before a loud caw sounded in Hiccup's right ear. He grid his teeth as a bird shoved its wing right passed his face, the bird spiraled and before Hiccup could even contemplate what a bird was doing flying so high up he felt himself being pushed back too far in the saddle. The weight of his head cranked his neck back, and his spin seemed to buckle under the pressure.

The connectors on his vest went taut and Toothless tried to level on his own, but his fin was still locked in ascending position. The flight seemed to slow mid-ascend, and while Hiccup was dangling back on moment he was cast up, looking at Toothless below him as he was dislodged.

He could only imagine what Alastair's nagging would be: "You should've fixed the connectors before you flew!" Hiccup wished he had.

He fell in a completely similar yet more terrifying rush of wind. Toothless let out a screech, not being able to get his body under control. It was a frustration more than a fear, but the way Hiccup's heart pounded irregularly as his body flipping and twisted through the clouds made him want to let out a yell himself.

"Oh Gods! _Oh Gods!_" Hiccup called out over and over, flipping to try and grab hold of Toothless wing when it was in his reach, but he only hit the side with his face. His cheek and jaw slacked as the whack just sent him spiraling down even more.

_::Get it together.::: _Hiccup kept hearing Toothless say, though it was never directed towards him. It was always Toothless chastising himself. Any thoughts regarding Hiccup were always one and the same. _::Get it togetherâ€œ|so you can save your human.:::_

His human.

Hiccup wasn't sure why he felt the need to smile. To waste such valuable time smiling over a dragon being possessive of him. But he did. His heartbeat slowed, his body calmed, and instinctively so did Toothless's. They fell into a deep dive, head first, but they were side by side, catching a glance mid-turn in the air. Hiccup looked at Toothless, smiling, and the night fury did something extraordinary.

He smiled as well.

All gums.

Hiccup reached out as Toothless spin, narrowly missing being whacked by his wing to grab hold of his saddle and he whipped his head over, throwing it against the heavy current of the wind. His neck ached but he was able to twist himself to get back on.

Though their time was gone, and rocky entrance to the water was coming right at them, and there was no way to turn quickly enough to avoid its wide expanse.

::Time to see what we're made ofâ€|:: Both Hiccup and Toothless thought together, their minds were oneâ€|now they had to see if they could transfer that into ridingâ€|

Or else they'd both die.

0o0

Toothless had given Hiccup some wise advice that day.

::Don't observe when you're flyingâ€|feel when you're flying.:::

Something without eyes can flyâ€|so Hiccup let his instincts take over. His instincts to trust Toothless's natural ability of flight to lead them through the thick of rocks. Toothless knew which way to bank, which way to twist. If he was independent, a rock forest would be more of a work out to him.

Hiccup was weighed down with that responsibility, to rely and be able to have that channel open enough so that they both could fly. He couldn't use his eyes, even as the rocks seemed to be so close, he couldn't think with his vision, he had to think with connection.

Their connection.

West bank. East spiral. Ascend. Rear back. East bank.

Hiccup relied, his foot moving on a candle flicker.

Position three. Position two. Position Three. Position four. Position six.

And the next thing Hiccup knewâ€|the weightlessness in his stomach was settling. It dropped heavily into him and he felt the need to hurl, turning his neck so that it landedâ€"somewhatâ€"in the ocean.

Toothless would've complained more if his own nervous gut didn't yak as wellâ€|though, of course, Hiccup meet firsthand what a dragon's nervous habit was. Fire.

He looked up and whipped the side of his mouth, seeing a ring of smoke and fire in front of him, and soon it was all over his face.

0o0

_::Well your droppings got on the side of my wing, so you shouldn't be that angry.::: _Toothless tried to reason, but Hiccup's face was too numb for him to let it slide.

_::A bit of throw up on your wing doesn't equal the same type of damage as you BURNING MY FACE!::: _Hiccup yelled, his stiff lips feeling stretched and too raw as he screamed.

_::I didn't do it intentionally::: _Toothless snuffed, almost with an innocence, Hiccup simply chewed the inside of his cheek. His face felt bloated and chewing made his molar gums feel a bit more in use.

Another catch wiggled on his line and he lifted it up, placing the fish in the pile of Toothless's dinner. They had to catch fish outside the pond whenever possible—or else the fish count in the cove would go down!

Another screech sounded and Hiccup almost snapped up in the bitter reminder of the bird that had ruined their flight, only to see that it was much worse. A small pack of wild terrible terrors flew in, smelling the pile of fish and surrounding Toothless and Hiccup.

Hiccup bit his lip, but Toothless simply growled. He considered them as children. Annoying children.

_:::Searching for food for daysâ€|give us!::: _The terrors demanded.

_:::There's a whole ocean beneath you, have a feast.::: _Toothless answered.

_:::Come on Toothless, give them a littleâ€|::: _Hiccup sighed.

_:::I do not submit to such younglingsâ€|::: _Toothless hissed, but Hiccup just rolled his eyes. Grabbing the fish he was cooking and threw it at a terror.

It ate it happily and Toothless sighed a bit, sliding over three fish to the smaller dragons. They all gnawed happily.

_:::This consideration isn't a normal tact for us.::: _Toothless reminded.

:::I knowâ€|but you're with me, you've got to practice a little bit of human tact too.:::

Toothless didn't answer, but the thought seemed to both annoy him and intrigue him.

The terror Hiccup had fed first burped out a little fire before meeting his eyes. Terrors were simple dragons, their thoughts primal, their loyalty reliant on circumstance and sensory. The terror immediately connected Hiccup with food and happily snuggled at his side, sleeping soundly with a full belly.

Hiccup stiffened a bit as he realized he was completely surrounded by dragons, and yet, he was still alive. In fact, he felt more accepted right at that moment than he'd ever had among humans.

It was a funny thoughtâ€|.

"Prince Hiccup!" Hiccup heard a boat bang into the shore, and Alastair hurriedly got out from it, knees scrapping on the hardened shore.

Hiccup grinned when Alastair dropped to his knees before him, panting.

"Prince Hiccup!" Alastair gasped again and Hiccup still let a laugh rumble behind his lips. Alastair was always quite amusing while worried. The boy reached forward but stopped himself and simply sat

on his feet.

Alastair must've seen them falling and went after them. Probably expecting to find them stranded in the ocean somewhere.

"Before you freak out, me and Toothless are clearly fine. We've just got a full house here" He said, referring to the little band of eating terrors around them, one completely asleep against Hiccup's side. He picked up the extra fish he had cooking over the fire and handed it to Alastair. "Here, have a fish."

Alastair looked at the food for a second, still looking like he wanted to nag, or yell but instead Alastair took it and sat down, across the fire, looking intently at the scene before him as he ate.

_:::Is there something wrong with the sun-haired one?:::_Toothless asked as he chopped on some fish, looking over at Alastair, but instead of looking away like he usually did, Alastair just looked right back at him, still staring. _:::I can't tell what your friend is thinkingâ€|.:::_Hiccup noted the frustration in Toothless's voice. He'd probably gotten too comfortable being around him so much, it felt odd not to see a human and immediately know them like he did with Hiccup.

"What's the matter, Alastair?" Hiccup asked. "You're making Toothless nervous."

_:::Nervous isn't the phrasing I'd useâ€|:::_Toothless snuffed.

"I'm making him nervous?" Alastair laughed a bit. "He's not a snake, that whole 'they're more afraid of us than we are of them' thing doesn't apply."

"Okayâ€|" Hiccup shrugged it off, not going there. Alastair chewed on the fish a bit more.

"I thinkâ€|you can end this war." He finally said, and Hiccup raised a brow to him.

"You always say you believe in me, Alastair." Hiccup said, not meeting his eyes. But the fact that he could say so in such casualty made Hiccup a little happy.

"I know, but, seeing you two togetherâ€|seeing you right nowâ€|with all theseâ€|I thought this would just be a deal, but you're really becoming friends. You're reallyâ€|meant for this."

Hiccup's eyes went wide. But then he looked over the day that was now setting over the horizon. He'd work up with a pit in his gut and everything to lose. But now he'd won the battle against Snotlout, he could continue with his plan, he could fly on Toothless with agility. He now had everything to gain.

_:::What did she say?:::_Toothless asked, confused at Hiccup's expression, even when his eyes softened and he smiled.

"It just boggles me every timeâ€|" Alastair continued. dragons are supposed to be monstersâ€|"

Hiccup gulped, knowing that Alastair meant his brother.

"Well, that's why we're doing thisâ€|so nothing like that ever happens again." He smiled at Toothless. "All three of usâ€|we're all going to end this."

_â€|as friendsâ€|::: _Hiccup finished.

Toothless's ears perked up, and as he gnawed on another fish, his throat vibrated, making a gagging noise. Hiccup reared towards him, not knowing what to do about a choking dragon. Luckily, he wasn't chokingâ€|but unluckily Hiccup discovered a new way dragons showed affection.

He tried to keep an appreciative attitude as Alastair chuckled, and Toothless beamed at the regurgitated fish head he had plumped in Hiccup's lap.

_â€|: Eat up, human friend.::: _Toothless said happily.

Okay that was probably one of the cutest endings we've got in this story. Which makes up for this 11,000 word mess you just read.

Anyways, someone returns the next chapter, and he's missed a whole lot of change.

Review Reponses:

92firedemon: Thank you!

Daughter of sea and wisdom: Oh yes, Toothless definitely knows. You really can't hide what gender you are from a dragon cause they just operate on a entirely different level of sensory. And I don't know if that's because I planned well or just because I'm a horribly long winded person. Either way it translate good into writing, so, I'll take it.

2400shadow: Yeah, a dagger isn't a preferred choice of weaponry on Berkâ€"more like back upâ€"but Hiccup's just more skilled at using smaller objects. He would've won a lot more quickly if he had just used the dagger right at the start, but his pride got in the way. And yep, Toothless knows. That'll be interesting to deal with in future chapters.

PrayerGirl: I'm a long-winded person, so I can't completely promise that some parts won't be dragged out and I might not even notice it. Just lemme know if something is going on for too long.

Teen Nightfury: Well this chapter is just as pleasantly (or perhaps painstakingly) long. And haha I went with both the left handed thing and the knife thing. Hiccup's just only got the natural talent to deal with smaller weapons, he's not naturally gifted with a sword. He'd need a really good teacher for that. But it wasn't much of a "discovery" that he's left handedâ€|cause he's been left handed his entire life. But back in the day it was kinda of like a "curse" if people used their left hand as the dominant hand, it was considered an omen or something.

**Ferdoos: Thank you! And yeah Toothless is onto Astrid, but

patience, young grasshopper, is a virtue.**

BlackWingedAngle26: Glad you like the story! Sorry it took soooooo long for an update but I finally got onto an update schedule so it'll be better.

Guest: Well I really can't say too much about the "big reveal". It's not really a spoiler that eventually Hiccup will find out, but other than that I don't wanna ruin the surprise. It won't be like you're expecting, though, I can assure you that. And, haha, I like Hiccup as well, but clearly nothing too romantic is going on right nowâ€"at least on Hiccup's endâ€"since he thinks Astrid's a boy. And yeah, Hiccup/Toothless is _the _relationship that'll probably have the biggest arch in the story so it's a slow build, but it's fun messing around with those two being able to talk in a movie-verse setting. And I'm soooooorry the updates are so far in between but I'm on a schedule now, so you get chapters twice a month. Yay!?

Maguffium239: Thank you!

Probus1701: You're actually not the first person to tell me that my writing kinda sounds like Rick Riordan. I actually haven't read any of his books completely, but I've skimmed them and I guessâ€|kinda. Only I kind hate writing in first person so, haha. But being compared to a professional writing is always a lovely compliment! And yeah, this story will actually be more in tandem with DoB soâ€|double surprises!

Hpnarutardsjedipirate1234: You're wish has been fulfilled.

Kist: Thank you! You can wait no more!

Chris5668: Noooo this story is nowhere near over. I'm just a slow joe and it took me forever to find time to get a schedule together and get these chapters done.

Hiccupsgirlfriend: The next chapter is right here, and thank you!

Deadlynadders: Astrid will get her action later, trust me.

Guest: Hiccup's 14, Astrid's 15, Snotlout's 17â€|. I don't really know how many other characters you want. Arte's probably in her mid-20's. I have nooooo clue how old Toothless is. In dragon-years he's probably an older teenager/young adultâ€|but I don't know the dragon years to human years equivalent yet XD

Wow guys, thank for the ton of reviews. Glad to know you all still pay attention this dusty thing that I pass off as a story. See you on the 15th!

Next Chapter: Honored and Entertained

9. Honored and Entertained

**This is definitely a more laid back chapter compared to the past

few. Some more comedy-based character development, maybe what you consider fanservice (?)â€"cause you guys won't stop asking about hiccup, I swearâ€"wrapped in some nice emotional moments to tie it all together. **

And, you're going to be noticing more and more in this chapter on how, while elements from the movie's plot are still going to be used now and again, it's going to be deviating pretty heavily from it slowly but surely|.

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Nine: Honored and Entertained

It was just as Astrid expected when it came down to Hiccup's post-duel treatment.

He was a star.

In his defense, it was an amazing turnout. He only had one person in the crowd thinking he could win and somehow he pulled off a show of strength and etiquette over his cousinâ€"the thought of king-to-be. Astrid couldn't help but smirk at the prince's success. Everything was actually working out for the moment. And though she didn't want to think to ill of the more peaceful plan in motionâ€"if things really did go well, she wondered if the rules against women could be lifted by Hiccup if he was sitting on the throne.

Surely, she'd more than proved herself, and while Hiccup was on the subject of changing societyâ€"why not throw in women's rights?

Of course that would involve breaking the news to himâ€!

She gulped as she walked down the hall to fetch Hiccup's breakfast. He was in the bathhouse, but insisted on eating while he bathed. Astrid really just wanted an excuse to get out of there. She had managed to steer clear of that place and stay fully clothed while there, but any time could be the jib.

She happened to keep an ear open as she went down the halls, hearing an entirely new chatter of whispers and gossip over the past week after Hiccup's duel.

"Look, there's warrior Alastairâ€!"

"I heard he trained the prince so he could defeat the warrior duke."

"He really is Atlas's kin, no other rookie could be that skilled in training while just being here a few months."

The tune had certainly sharpened around the palace. Astrid went from a subject of disappointment and sighing 'oh how far the mighty Hofferson kin have fallen' to being praised just by the birth name yet again. People's shifting opinions turned her stomach, and she got Hiccup's breakfast from the kitchen, putting some extra food on and arranging so to look a little fancy. She didn't know why exactly she felt compelled to be such a pecking servant, but at least he had earned a little waiting on.

Humming a quirky little song on the way back, Astrid bumped into Lindir, Snotlout's maid. She had only been acquainted with her a few times, mostly seeing her exchanging gossip with Arte, but she was doing the same as she was, bringing a tray of food, most likely to the fallen warrior duke.

Snotlout stayed inside his room most the week, it was a shameful way to accept defeat, but Astrid could already tell humiliation wasn't something Snotlout knew how to carry respectfully. His duty to be in the King's place while he was away was a job from bed, at the moment. Things were still quiet, so there wasn't much to do, but the mood had changed from Snotlout's lavish 'I'm in charge' parties to a simple warrior duke playing king from his bed.

She peaked in Snotlout's room, seeing him in bed, simply giving a weak smile and a light kiss to Lindir before she trotted out, bumping into Astrid who stood, shamelessly, in the doorway.

"Oh, excuse me warrior Alastair," Lindir gave a little bow before leaving, by the looks of the basket she was carrying, she was on her way to the bath as well. Astrid peaked in a bit further, finding Snotlouts looking at her, challenging her with shadowy eyes, as if they drew her in she stepped inside, shutting the door behind her and putting Hiccup's plate on a desk beside her.

She surveyed the room around her, it had windows, but the large curtain surrounding them blanketed it in darkness and stunk of Snotlout's pity. She spotted the bandage on Snotlout's shoulder. Hiccup had punctured with his dagger pretty well, and it would take a good while for the wound to close up. Astrid saw a light red stain on the bandages, and wondered how much aggression Hiccup had really placed behind that blow. The thought of stabbing still made him sick, even after such a great win, but she knew even the prince could get caught up in vengeful energy.

Still, the room seemed much fuller with life than Hiccup's room, where even in the day the stone walls were only lit by the flicker of candle light.

"Do you intend to sit in here and stew in your pity forever?" Astrid pried a bit. She couldn't say she didn't get a sense of enjoyment, rubbing it in. She usually wasn't one for it, but, oh, had he deserved it.

"Do you intend to leave here with your life?" The same demons in his eyes still cast shadows under his lids, but she stood her ground. Jealousy looked scary but hardly had a bite behind the bark. "Just tell me one thingâ€|Alastair."

"What?"

"What's the real story with you twoâ€|?" Snotlout smirked a bit when Astrid hitched her breath. She didn't even want to begin to know what he meant by thatâ€|yet still she asked.

"W-What do you mean?" Darn, she stuttered. That was a giveaway.

"You two are always sneaking out and being out all day, and you're nowhere to be found around the markets or the other recreational areas on Berk." He talked on and on, pausing to take a bite out of

his breakfast. Astrid's fist curled, her nails biting into her palms. The fact that she didn't know where this was going bothered her most.

"What do you want Snotlout?" Astrid snuffed.

"You came in here to rub it in my face that I lostâ€œ I might as well make you uncomfortable too." He smirked at her. "I'm going to find out what you two are hiding. Mark my words."

Astrid had a million and one ways to insult him or give him a good comeback in her mind but she hushed them all. All of which, while snappy, would've just confirmed that they had something to hide, and she'd hardly be the downfall of Prince Hiccup's plans. Instead she let out a heavy sigh and a pout, shaking her head before picking up the plate of food and making her way out of the door, listening to Snotlout's breathy laughs as she closed the door behind her and rolled her eyes.

Going in there was a bad idea.

Oo0

She finally made it to the bath house, sighing at the humidity of it and glad that she had at least put on a lighter tunic, but due to the thinner nature of it she put on her cape just in case. But it was better than the thicker warrior's garments she usually wore.

She looked around to see that of the large number of people in the bath that day, a lot seemed to be congregating around a certain part of the bath. The part of the bath she was walking towards.

Oh Gods noâ€œ!

Astrid saw Hiccup's private corner of the bath being overrun by a group ofâ€œ girls. They looked like Snotlout's little puppets, all mooning behind Hiccup now simply because he was the front-liner for the throne and not the warrior duke. She sucked her teeth. What little gold diggers.

"So how long had you been wielding a dagger? It's such a rare skill." One of them cooed.

"Wellâ€œ umâ€œ I've been carving models for flying machines for a while." Hiccup answered tentatively, biting his lip, probably in an attempt to not tell them all to back off or he'd use that dagger on them. His back was pushed to the farthest end of the bath, blushing from the heat and the close proximity of all the women.

What kind of girl pushed up on a prince in a bath? Astrid rolled her eyes, they were all so desperate, and most of them older than Hiccup by at least ten years.

Astrid leaned down on her feet near the edge of the bath, slamming down his plate of food to create a bigger noise to call attention all the interviewing. All the girl's eyes sparkled towards her as well, but Astrid didn't even have time to go there.

"It's so nice how you and Alastair are always together. You're like brothers." One of the girls said and Astrid rolled her eyes just as

Hiccup did as she took off her boots and let her feet hang in the water. She splashed a little forward, making some of the girls back off.

"Yeah, that's me and Alastairâ€|good ol' brothers." Hiccup almost laughed.

"Alright, ladies, Prince Hiccup has to bathe now, so, why don't you all let him be?"

"I'll scrub your back for you Prince Hiccup," one of the girls offered, and Astrid realized it was Lindir. By then Astrid had had just about enough of them. She gave all the girls a scarily pleasant look.

"That would be my job," Astrid said drolly and all the girls either grinned, laughed, or blushed. But it made them leave.

"Well done, sir." Hiccup sighed, sinking into the water until it came to his chin. "I don't think I've ever had that much positive attention in my life." Astrid noted the small smile, though. She knew despite being annoyed by the girls, he was proud of himself.

"Get used to it. With Snotlout sulking in his room and these ladies smelling blood in the water for a new heir to suck up to, its fair game for you."

"Well, I could care less about these heartless she-witches." Hiccup lifted a wet arm out of the water and took a piece of fruit from his breakfast plate. "That duel was the first stepâ€|.to secure my right to throne as the King of Berk."

He seemed extra perked up about it as he ate, determined hums in his chewing, and Astrid simply splashed her feet and not caring that her cape was getting a bit damp. She was glad Hiccup wasn't asking her to come in with him. After her turning him down every time they went there she was glad he finally caught on that she wasn't one for public bathing.

"Butâ€|my father's coming home todayâ€|" Hiccup said after a good while of silence. He had finished eating and finally took to scrubbing himself, his eyes were serious and downcast, and Astrid stopped her splashing.

They had gotten word a few days ago at a reporters meeting that the King's boat was set to dock soon.

"How do you think that's going to turn outâ€|?" Astrid asked tentatively.

"I'm not sure. I've got nothing to worry aboutâ€|I won the duel, my father will probably be really proud that I defended myself, challenged Snotlout, and actually wonâ€|"

"Yeahâ€|but, you're still worried?" Astrid could tell he was, he didn't get that look unless he was deep in thought. When he got like that it was always the hardest to look him in the eye, it was almost like she could see straight into his turbulent mind when she did. It seemed too intimate, especially since he was technically naked then. That was simply something else Astrid had grown numb to.

"Well, I'm not going to let him push me around anymore!" Hiccup got a bit redder in the face. "That might cause more problems and what is he going to say when I finally get around to proposing my plan to end the war?"

"Which is that plan exactly?" Astrid felt it right to ask. "Gaining Toothless's trust is out of the way, which was a major hurdle on its own, but what about actually ending it? You're both coming from stubborn political ends."

"Don't remind me!" Hiccup sighed. He floated over to the edge, looking up at Astrid with those eyes. But he was looking straight at her so she couldn't look away. His elbows and arms red from being in the steamy water too long. "Me and Toothless need to perfect our flight a bit more, we'll be more intimidating that way!" Astrid laughed quietly at that statement, knowing that flying on Toothless wasn't completely necessary for the plan to work. But pegging that in the plan was a classic Hiccup way to stall...and he was in love with the sky, after all.

"Then after that," He continued. "I don't know if we should go to my dad first or maybe this 'mother' all the other dragons talk about so much."

"And what are you going to do with the mother dragon, have some tea with her?" Astrid laughed a little, but Hiccup didn't breathe a chuckle.

"I don't know yet."

Astrid sighed. He was still making it up as he went along. She loved it when he took things seriously and planned ahead, but it always made her want to smack him when he was in his 'I'll just see what happens' mood.

"I know you hate it when I don't plan ahead just trust me, okay?" Hiccup tried to convince her.

"I'm still here aren't I?" Astrid said before getting up from the water and grabbing a towel, throwing an extra one at Hiccup to dry off. "Come on Prince Hiccup, your father is probably going to be pulling in soon."

0o0

Hiccup put on his best clothes. Black tunic, custom belt with the Berk crest, gloves, palace boots, Viking helmet, and his cape. He felt heavy and stuffed compared to the clothes he had been wearing normally while his father had been away. It was nice to be able to go out with Alastair to go see Toothless whenever he wanted, but it would be back to when it all first started.

Alastair had on his best clothes as well, his one medal still trumping his medal-less cape. They walked in silence to the second level of the palace where the throne room was. Stoick had gotten in just a little while ago. Hiccup could hear his own breathing in his ears, his footsteps echoed and his heart pounded just as it had when he battling Snotlout. Meeting his own father put his body under the same stress as a sword duel!

He felt Alastair's hand on his shoulder, and he calmed down a bit.

"Relax, my prince," Alastair said lightly, not letting go of his shoulder while they walked, and Hiccup couldn't say that he didn't need the comfort. He had joked about it earlier that morning, but maybe Alastair really was like his brother in a way. He certainly favored Atlas in that respect.

Two guards opened the grand doors to the throne room where Stoick sat on his throne, the sea breeze was still fresh on his scent, but a particularly prideful glow radiated from him. Hiccup had seen that glow before from his fatherâ€|but never had it been for him.

Hiccup walked in silence to his father's feet, a cold shiver coming over him when he felt Alastair remove his hand from his shoulder, still behind him, the two got down on their knees, bowing to the king.

"He-hello fatherâ€|" Hiccup gulped. He'd never been so nervous before his dad, he even called himâ€"so formallyâ€"'father'. Every ounce of snark seemed to flee from him and it left his hands cold and numb against the stone floor.

"I heard you and your cousin got into a scrap while I was away." Stoick started off with, leaning forward with interested eyes.

"He insulted my birthrightâ€|so we had a duel." Hiccup explained, still looking at the floor as opposed to Stoick.

"And you won!" Hiccup could hear the smile in Stoick's guff of an excited announcement. He stood from the throne and walked over to his son, leaning down and patting his back, allowing Hiccup to finally meet his father's eyes. They beamed with pride, and Hiccup knew that even if it was just for winning some duel, it was something he had always wanted. Hiccup smiled, weakly at first but the corners of his mouth kept twitching upwards more and more.

"Pulled the old dagger trick, huh?" Stoick laughed a bit. "Oldest trick in the book."

"He's particularly skilled with the dagger," Alastair suddenly added, the boy blushed a bit in embarrassment at his forthright exclam and looked away. "..Sirâ€|" he added for good measure.

"And I hear you helped train Hiccup to get him ready?" Stoick turned to Alastair. The boy looked over, nodding quickly, back erect. "Well done, noble teachers of the warcraft are appreciated here in the palace."

Hiccup could see Alastair practically bursting at the seams with happiness as well. It was a good day for them both, especially since the last time they were before Stoick in the throne room, it was to be reprimanded for being out recklessly all night.

"I'm glad you've been keeping my boy in productive matters while I've been away." Stoick thanked before turning back to Hiccup. "And you, that Haddock spirit is finally shining throughâ€|" he slapped Hiccup's back affectionately "â€"well done, son."

Stoick got up and walked back to his seat. "There's a play tonight as a celebratory entertainment after my safe return, and I'd like for you to come with me."

Hiccup winced a bit. He never went to those playsâ€|they always did something of entertainment value for the King after he had been on a long journey, but it was always such a social event. Hiccup felt like ornament there rather than a person anyone wanted to engage with. Butâ€|his father actually wanted him there this time.

"Alrightâ€|I'll go," Hiccup agreed, looking over at Alastair. "As long as Alastair can come with us."

Stoick smiled. "Of course. But firstâ€|." A guard came over with a chest, Stoick opened it and pulled out a medal, walking over to Alastair and placing it at his cape. It was a Medal of Nobility, a rare medal for a warrior to get, but a very well respected one. Hiccup recalled Atlas having many medals of nobilityâ€|and looking at Alastair receive one seemed almost like flashback.

Stoick went back to the chest and pulled out another medal, a Medal of Skill. Two medals in one day? Hiccup smiled, feeling happier for Alastair than he thought he would, but Alastair turned and smiled at him instead, when Stoick didn't go over and attach it to Alastair's capeâ€|but to his.

Hisâ€|first medalâ€|.

"I'm proud of you son, you really showed a lot of promise by winning that duel." Stoick said as he fastened it, and both Alastair and Hiccup stood, beaming.

"I announce these two warriors with medals of nobility and skill to exemplify their efforts." Stoick said aloud. Alastair had already gone through thisâ€|the very first night he arrived on Berk and saved Hiccup. He hadn't been there for Alastair's first medal, but Hiccup had always been a lonely bystander when warriors were given medals. And now..he had one.

His planâ€|was really working.

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Astrid never had to dress in 'evening wear' before. Not while being a boy, at least. Mostly when she and Ruffnut would go on a night on the town they'd wear dresses, maybe do something interesting with their hair, but being a man and going to a play as a personal guest of the Viking prince and kingâ€|what was she supposed to wear?

"Geez, you take longer than a girl to get ready, Alastair." Hiccup called out from behind the door. Astrid threw on an extra shirt before slipping outside, catching him putting on his pants, whichâ€|"just like in the bathâ€|seeing the prince in such little attire was hardly that mind altering anymore. She couldn't afford getting flustered over it so she simply suppressed it as something normal.

"Iâ€|well, I don't exactly have something to wear." She admitted, in

a tiny voice. Hiccup choked back a laugh and she punched his arm lightly. "Don't make fun, I'm serious. I guess I'm just going to have to wear the clothes I wear the meetings." It was a hopelessly gaudy outfit, but she'd manage.

"So, just borrow something of mineâ€|" Hiccup shrugged instead and laughed a bit more, going over to his drawers. He pulled out a red and gold tunic and a white undershirt. "Here, red never suited me, and I got this as a birthday gift from Trader Johann last year, so it's fairly new."

Astrid looked at the perfect stitching of the garment, the thick fabric, the golden lining. Running her thumb over it she felt it would certainly be a nice alternative to her normal warrior's uniform. The mail of her loin piece and otherwise having to double up on undershirts was getting unbearable, but how was she going to pull off such a tight garment?

"What, you've never seen a tunic before?" Hiccup still chuckled a bit. "Get dressed."

"R-right," Astrid held the clothes to her chest and went back into her room, shutting the door loudly. Hiccup had mentioned a few times how odd she was when it came to dressing and bathing, and not for the first time, but it was always a dodge and burn to avoid answering it directly.

She wrapped herself a bit more tightly, it would be a bit awkward and stiff for her chest but she had to try and pull off not wearing baggy clothes all the time.

Almost fifteen minutesâ€"of re-adjusting, re-wrapping, and a few dramatic groans of discomfortâ€"later Astrid resurfaced, Hiccup already fully dressed and tapping his boots impatiently on the bed frame. He had his prince's helmet on, matching crÃ"me colored long-sleeved tunic and pants, his palace boots still on, and he had on a cape Astrid hadn't seen before. His right arm was covered, while his left arm wasn't covered by the cape at all. Most Viking men who wore such a cape had so that their right arms were free, but the prince was a 'special' individual. And his Medal of Skill hung perfectly on his cape.

She couldn't help but smile a bit fondly at his appearance. When she thought of a prince, this was what she thought of. Regal, confident, and well dressed, she had never seen Hiccup as the total package of Viking Prince, attitude and clothes to match, but now that she got a good look at himâ€|it was nice. She was firm in her thoughts that Hiccup was probably better off without the political system, but it sure looked good when he tried.

"You take _forever _getting ready and then when you finally come out you just stare at me?" Hiccup sucked his teeth playfully, getting up and going in a little circle around her, acting like he was inspecting her clothing. "Not bad for someone from Merkskof."

"I'll have you know people from Merkskof are some of the more civilized of the Viking islands." Astrid crossed her arms, though she knew she could've tried a bit harder to look better. The dingy brown of her pants didn't particularly favor the bright red of the tunic, her boots were muddy no matter how much she tried to clean them, and

she was overdue for cutting the ends of her hair, the clean cut of her quick axe cuts always growing out eventually. She couldn't have such long hair or the length would begin to favor her femininity.

He stood back from her, and Astrid got another closer look at him. Yeah, he looked goodâ€|she wasn't going to deny that.

"And youâ€|um..." she continued, but stopped herself. Hiccup was already interested, though.

"I what?" Hiccup raised a brow.

She clearly wasn't thinking. "Youâ€|lookâ€|so nice." She said slowly and awkwardly, probably the only saving grace for the fact that sheâ€"Alastairâ€"just told the prince he looked 'nice'. Hiccup blinked a few times.

"Umâ€|yeah, thanks."

They stood around awkwardly for a few moments, chewing their cheeks and rocking back on their heels. It felt like some kind of blind date, Astrid hated to admit, though she knew Hiccup asked her clearly because he didn't want to be bored, her staring at him and then complimenting his outfit in such aâ€|girly way, kind of killed the friendly mood.

Hiccup scrunched his lip a bit, but then it evened out and turned for the door with a good natured wry to his smile. "Come on let's go, or did you want me to kiss your hand before we leave?"

Astrid jumped on playing along like her life depended on it and punched his shoulder, a little harder, for good measure. "Gross. Keep your slobber to yourself."

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It was odd walking around the village, Astrid had seen so little of it since she was there.

The lantern and torch lights illuminating the rows of stands and peasant shops outside, people were selling things, fixing things, trying on things, others just standing around and talking.

Hiccup and the King had a certain air about then, everyone cleared as they walked past, some bowed, some welcomed Stoick back from his trip, and Astrid was absolutely sick of hearing girls giggling and mooning at "oh, it's Prince Hiccup" like little lovestruck farm girls. They barely knew anything about himâ€|about his struggles, his motivations, his fears, his secrets. He was just someone else to dive after because they might be that 'one in a million' who gets to marry the king-to-be. None of them knew Hiccupâ€|not likeâ€|sheâ€|didâ€|.?

Astrid's eyes widened a bit and she tugged at the bottom of her tunic, chewing her lip. Even those thoughts were embarrassing. She cut her gaze over to Hiccup and Stoick, they both looked so much higher than herâ€|she felt oddly out of place walking beside them, but there she was. If she had been in a dressâ€|she would be certain the gossip would be different, but instead they were all thinking they had a chance with him when a girl had been walking beside the

prince for weeks.

The theater house was a large area in a dugout a few feet deep. A large, flat stage and even larger seating area, but there was a row of seats, in the center a bit back with nothing in front or behind it, that was reserved for special members of the palace. The King and the prince getting a perfect view. The King's seat was comfortable for one, though Hiccup's seat could probably sit three people with how tiny he was. Astrid was sure he had fun lazing around in the chair the few times he did go a play but instead he lead her to his seat and told her to just sit in the same seat with him.

Astrid was smacking herself for still feeling like the fact that she was even there was some sort of date. She fidgeted awkwardly in the seat while Hiccup stayed mostly in his own thoughts. He was looking at the stage, but his eyes seemed like they were looking into his own mind more than the drama. Though he had a lot to think about, even Astrid could admit that things were going good for him at the moment. He defeated his cousin, got his father to be proud, got a medal, flew successfully on Toothless and was starting to form a strong friendship with the most feared and mysterious dragon in the Viking societyâ€|. he was actually incrediblyâ€|lucky. He took dumb luck to a new level, that was for sure. But then, the fact that she had gotten the punishment to babysit him working to her advantage was pretty lucky as well.

Still deep in thought, Astrid turned her attention away from Hiccup and to the play. Vikings weren't known for their brilliant playwriting, or even their brilliant actors, but it was something to do in spare time for entertainment. The play featured a woman who was sold off to marry the soon-to-be rival chief even though she's in love with the chief of her home island, and how the entangling love triangle fuels the worst part of a war.

Blood, fighting, and a sulky, manipulative girl seducing men. Astrid sighed. There weren't any plays on Merkskof, but if this is what they were likeâ€|she was glad she was missing them. Leaning on the arm rest, she heard a small snore from Hiccup and realized he had dozed off. His eyes were only closed lightly, and to anyone walking by they wouldn't assume he was sleeping, but Astrid chuckled a bit. The play was a snore festâ€|and the manipulative woman in the play probably rubbed Hiccup the wrong way, if he was paying even a speck of attention to it.

The torch lights were bright, the actors were loud, but her thoughts were deep and kept pulling her deeper into the same doze Hiccup was inâ€|as if it were contagiousâ€|

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Astrid was comfortable, her left cheek was against something soft, and her nose was filled withâ€|Hiccup's scent. She didn't open her eyes yet, only scooting further into whatever she was leaning against and the comfort returned. She heard a light snort but still didn't open her eyes. She remembered a similar feeling back when she was littleâ€|she'd lean against Atlas in such a way when she'd have a nightmare. Gently he'd take his younger sister into her arms and rock her back to sleep, maybe telling her a story or two about the great and mighty foreign warrior Alastairâ€|.

"Atlasâ€|" she mumbled, scooting closer still, turning her nose into the softness.

"Umâ€|okay Alastair, you're being weird tonight."

That made her open her eyes. She was staring right up into Hiccup's eyes, he looked confused no doubt. She had fallen asleep, and must've leaned against Hiccup becauseâ€"of courseâ€"leaning the opposite way to sleep on the armrest would've been too much of the normal thing to happen.

"Oh Godsâ€|.oh Godsâ€|ohâ€|Gods!" Astrid jumped up from her chair and bounced a bit on her feet, springing back and forward a few times before jittering down. "I'm sorryâ€|I was justâ€|." She swallowed, how to explain that so that it didn't seem weird.

"You mentioned Atlasâ€|" Hiccup's tone softened, and stood as well, dusting off his shoulder for some reason.

"Umâ€|yeah, when-when I was little," she cleared her throat, making sure her voice wasn't too light. "â€"And I got scared, Atlas would come in and stay with me until I went back to sleepâ€|." That story could still work if she was a boy, right? Astrid wondered, but Hiccup gave a soft smile so it looked like it had gotten over.

"You two were really close, huh?"

"Yeahâ€|two peas in a pod. But, I had Ruffâ€"um Runeâ€|to keep me company too."

"Runeâ€|hmm, you never mentioned him." Hiccup sat on the armrest. "What's he like?"

"We both became warriors, though he's probably off at seaâ€|he's looking for his brother too."

"Oh, he was part of the group that went missingâ€|?" Hiccup asked, and Astrid nodded.

"Well, if Rune's anything like you, he'll be fine." Hiccup smiled and hopped off the armrest when he heard his father call over to him. The play had long since finished and afterwards, the audience would use the space to mingle and eat. Hiccup and Astrid mostly stood beside Stoick while he laughed with people, occasionally he'd brag about Hiccup's duelâ€"even though pretty much the entire village had been thereâ€"and a few times he'd mention "Alastair's help". The whole thing was a privilegeâ€|yet ultimately just as boring as the play.

Hiccup nudged her arm and gestured for them to walk off, they talked behind a table, as away from the mingling as they could be.

"Let's get out of here." Hiccup suggested quickly.

"Butâ€|" Astrid looked over her shoulder at Stoick. "Your dadâ€|"

"He'll be fine, besides, he's bragged enough and these parties aren't really my thing." Hiccup smiled. "We'll catch up on things tomorrow." He grabbed her arm and tugged at her to follow him and they both

snuck out of the partyâ€|. .

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"So do I need to ask where we're going in the middle of the evening?" Alastair asked as they walked through the market. Despite the play, there were plenty of civilians still in the market, more gossiping and chatting going on than buying at that hour, though.

He heard the faint remarks of the recent peace among the island, knowing very well they were referring to the lack of dragon raids. For an island always at the wits in wait for a dragon attack, going weeks without one seemed oddly misplaced, as if they missed the adrenaline of their lives being in danger. It was something that would've ogled Hiccup's mind more if he wasn't aware of the reason. He only swallowed in fear of what kind of massive attack the dragons were planning.

Maybe Toothless would know? Granted, he had already been shot down when the dragons came to him in the cove that night, announcing their plan that they were looking for him, but maybe this was a predetermined idea that was only manifesting itself now? Hiccup still tried to not connect the dots that the island was going to be attacked because they wanted himâ€|or at least, so he figured. His power was fading more in more into a normal state but he dreaded having to tell anyone else but Alastairâ€|especially his father. He knew the kind of reaction he'd get, especially since he was finally starting to get on his father's good side. What would the King say to his son suddenly claiming he could read a dragon's mind?

Either he'd think he was crazyâ€|or think he was just crazy enough to be a weapon.

Both outcomes had little appeal.

He felt an elbow nudge his side and he snapped back into the reality of things, his heavy thought making the lanterns blur momentarily.

"Ermâ€|where else?" Hiccup recalled Alastair's last question and regained conversation.

"Toothless?" Alastair whispered, but Hiccup saw the twinge of an excited smile in his lips, like he was enjoying the secret. Hiccup gave a nod, and Alastair stared blankly forward as they slipped to the far left of the palace and made their way to Raven's Point.

By the time they got there the sun had already set, but Alastair didn't complain, he seemed lost in his own thoughts for most of the walk, never quite recouping from after the play.

Hiccup had to admit that Alastair had been acting strange that night, he didn't exactly know what to pinpoint it on, though, until he mentioned his brother. Hiccup constantly kept forgetting how awkward the plan must've been for Alastairâ€|not only was he a warrior but his brother was killed in a dragon raid. It hadn't been long since Atlas was killedâ€|the wound was probably still fresh. It was especially at times like that when Hiccup wished he _could _hear human thoughts as well.

Still, the silence lingered as they walked, and Toothless gave a small grumble as the noise of them approaching woke him from his nap. Still, there was a certain radiance that came out of Toothless when Hiccup arrived, he hadn't been around as much as he would've liked to after the battle and his recent spur of popularity and be watched so much more heavily. And the weight of not being able to fly as oftenâ€"now that they couldâ€"weighed on the night fury.

_:::You are here at such a late hour?::: _Toothless recalled, walking up and nudging his nose in the palm of Hiccup's hand.

_:::My father's back home.::: _Hiccup sighed and sat next to Toothless. The dragon curled behind him and Hiccup leaned again his skin, it was warm, and the heartbeat beneath the leathery scales mixed with the calm of the moon peacefully.

_:::But you don't sound pleased.::: _Toothless said. _:::Did he not understand something again?::: _Hiccup almost forgot how much he had ranted to Toothless about his problems with his father, probably more so to Toothless than Alastair. And Toothless remembered it allâ€|he could tell as the snatches of conversations bubbled forth in the night fury's mind, recalling everything for reference in conversation. Was that how dragon's thought, Hiccup wondered? Or just how _Toothless _thought?

_:::No, everything's fine.::: _Hiccup almost laughed, pulling out his cape from behind him and showing Toothless the one medal that now clinked at his backside. _:::I finally got a warrior's medalâ€|a medal of skill for the battle I won against Snotlout.:::_

_:::Human ways of praise are strange.::: _Toothless shook his head and placed it back in the nook of his folded arms, still listening to Hiccup even as his eyes lulled closed.

_:::It's justâ€|a really big honor, I had finally given up on ever getting a medal and just when I'm about to try and change everythingâ€|I'm finally fitting in.::: _

Toothless's eyes opened at that one.

Hiccup could feel the uneasy fear spiking in the dragon's blood. He turned and was met with the moon-washed glow of night fury eyes.

_:::Are you going back on your word?::: _Toothless asked, it was a firm and serious question, a perfect balance of a disheartenment over betrayal and almost a threat. Hiccup gulped.

_:::No, Toothless, it's not like thatâ€|::: _Hiccup bit his lip. So what was it likeâ€|? _:::The irony is just odd, is all. I'd never take your flight away just because I'm popular for a little while.::: _Hiccup knew _that w_as what was bothering Toothless. The mechanics of their deal weren't so fragile that Hiccup would abandon Toothless in the cove and take away his fin, and Hiccup could feel that Toothless knew thatâ€|but the fear still lingered, less on the deal and more on a fear of losing the bond they had began to grow. They both had a romance with the sky, with learning more about the other, and with changing the way their societies worked. Hiccup wasn't about to let it go any more than Toothless was.

His turbulence of thoughts seemed to register with Toothless as the dragon curled back down, but still kept his eyes open. There was a period of silence as they simply listened to each other's breathing, the light wind against the leaves of the trees, the gurgle of the water with a flip of fish.

Toothless looked over at Alastair as he leaned against a boulder, Hiccup followed his gaze and the boy did look particularly deep in thought, as he had been all night. Hiccup barely understood the bond of siblings, having none, and never being particularly close with his older cousin, but he could tell it was Atlas that Alastair was thinking of.

_::The sun-haired one is troubled._Toothless observed, Alastair didn't even seem to notice that the dragon was looking at him, his eyes were simply blank as he stared to the side.

_::Yeah, I think Alastair's thinking about his brother:::_Hiccup sighed.

::The one who perished?:

_::Yeah:::_Hiccup gulped again, Toothless was always so nonchalant about death. But perhaps it was viewed differently to dragons than humans?

_::Your friend doesn't speak much?:_Toothless said. _::Hasn't spoken all but a few words since being here._

_::I told you, Alastair's just not comfortable about you yet. But he will be._Hiccup had hope for Alastair and Toothless one day being able to be in good company just as he was, they obviously couldn't speak to each other on the same plane, but acknowledging each other was a start. _::I want you two to be closer::for my two friends to be friends as well._Hiccup spoke a bit wistfully, thinking to himself more so to Toothless, but the night fury shuffled at the words, taking them to heart it seemed.

Toothless turned a gaze over to Alastair again, and simply stared, but Hiccup could feel the gears turning in his brain.

_::Then I shall try to be more open to the sun-haired warrior._Toothless said before curling back in his arms. Hiccup knew it was a gesture purely to show that the dragon _did _care about something Hiccup wanted, and it made his heart swell. He gave the side of Toothless's neck a scratch, and his wing twitched a bit in pleasure.

The moon rose higher in the sky still, and the night chill came in a bit harder that night, Hiccup began to shiver only lightly even with the warmth of Toothless behind him, but the night fury was more awake now, having snapped from the lull of his nap. Hiccup felt the energy, and knew that they should probably get in a good fly before they headed back to the palace.

Toothless sensed the thought and immediately perked up, standing. The flight gear had been left in the cove that time around and Hiccup went over to Alastair after he assembled it.

"Hold my cape while I take Toothless for a fly." Hiccup said, though

it was still a little on the demanding side. He winced a bit. Technically Alastair was still his body guard, he had to do what he said, but Hiccup was trying to build their friendship on more than mere duty. They were friendsâ€|even if he was a prince nonetheless. "Ifâ€|you want to." He added, thought gave word to an additional thought. "Unless, you want to come with us."

Alastair had simply listened in a dazed look before that suggestion and he looked up, a strange look in his eyes, as he looked at Hiccup, the Toothless, then back at Hiccup.

"I don't think that's a good idea." He answered dryly and Hiccup twitched at the tone of his voice.

"Alastair, you have to warm up to Toothless eventually." Hiccup baited.

"I just don't want to fly, okay. That's your thing." Alastair said, but his voice was small, and he pulled his knees to his chest. Hiccup felt a bit stupid for askingâ€|dragons killed Atlas, after allâ€|but Toothless was different, and he hoped that eventually he'd realize that to every extent. Alastair seemed to make some kind of progress the day of his duel, when he found him and Toothless on the island with the terrible terrorsâ€|but since then he seemed clam up and the fact. The limbo was making Hiccup weary, but he knew that it was just Alastair fighting his natural instincts.

"Okay," Hiccup let it go for the moment. "We'll be back in about 15 minutes." He told him, and mounted Toothless, before taking off into the sky.

The chill in the wind and the less turbulent night air was perfect to clear Hiccup's head. There was so much he had to do now that his father was homeâ€|his plan wasn't just about flying, it was so much grander, scarier. But Hiccup had chosen this path, he couldn't back down now just because he won a battleâ€|

Do you know anything about the raid, Toothless? Hiccup asked while gliding gently over the topside of the clouds, they were thin that night, but Toothless needed a slight rest after getting the more complicated exercising maneuvers out of the way. His wing muscles were taunt, but at least the winds were calm.

Not as much as you need me to know. Toothless said. _But it can't be anything good._

And they're here for meâ€| Hiccup sighed. _I justâ€|don't get why I'm so dangerous._

Such powers within a human frighten them, it's a difficult time for our kind, you cannot understand.

Maybe I would if you'd explain it to me. Hiccup whined a bit.

If the situation needs it, then I will. Toothless closed the subject. _Right now it would only burden you further._

In a strange way Toothless was thinking of Hiccup's wellbeing, but Hiccup's mind burned with the need to know. Would they dragons come

and take him away? Or just burn everything along with him? Could he even stay there knowing that his presence left everyone in such danger?

::See, it's already making your mind a windstorm.:: _Toothless said.
::Take a deep breath, human::

Hiccup did so, and smiled.

::Thanks Toothless::

::It's no heed::

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It was a silent walk back while Alastair was still lost in his own thoughts, and Hiccup was at that point as well. Once they got back to the palace everyone was getting ready for their nightly posts or simply heading to bed, a few girls tried to swarm around Hiccup but thankfully Alastair got them to back off.

"You're father's looking for you," Arte told Hiccup as she passed them in the hallway. Hiccup simply raised a hand to indicate that he had heard her, but he figured he'd deal with his father in the morning, assuming they'd actually have breakfast together for once.

Hiccup went straight for his sleeping pants as soon as he entered the room.

"Well, you're turning in early." Alastair commented on.

"It's been a long day!" He took off his cape, folding it and placing it on his nightstand, letting the medal reflect the dull candle light, he smiled, but tried not to feel so happy about it. He couldn't get too attached to it, to this lifestyle. It was all about the change and until he knew how he couldn't hold onto too much.

"It has well, goodnight!"

"Oh, wait, Alastair." Hiccup called out. The boy turned. "I'm sorry about Atlas. I know that's why you've been acting weird all day, this all must be really hard for you."

Alastair was silent for a few moments, his eyes stormy even in the low light, glossed over in exhaustion and thoughts. But in the thick of it all he gave Hiccup a smile. "Thank you, Prince Hiccup. It hits me kind of hard sometimes, that's all!"

"I know but I do really hope that what happened with Atlas doesn't stop you from one day being friends with Toothless!"

He was stopped mid-sentence, as a knock rapped at the door.

"Not now Arte, I'm about to go to sleep." Hiccup growled.

"I'll get it," Alastair sighed, and when he opened the door, it was the king. Unannounced and out of his formal wear. Hiccup saw the stun straighten Alastair's spine, and he backed off, going to straight to Hiccup's side before wistfully announcing: "You're father's

here."

"Dad? Umâ€|" Hiccup was just as stunned, it was so rare Stoick would make a trip to his room in the wee of the night, unannounced and in casual wear. It clearly wasn't a diplomatic matter that he didn't just have someone fetch him.

"I'llâ€|leave you two alone," Alastair fidgeted awkwardly but gave Hiccup's shoulder a light pat, smiling as he closed his private door behind him.

Hiccup bit his lip, and looked up as Stoick took a seat at his bedside.

"Yes, dad?" Hiccup asked again, but Stoick seemed just as out of sorts as Hiccup felt. They were both a little out of their element.

"Let'sâ€|take a trip together." Stoick asked in one mighty breath, and Hiccup had to double take to make sure he'd heard him correctly.

"A tripâ€|?" Hiccup smiled a bit. He remembered when they used to take family fishing trips, he never particularly liked fishing, but it was the difference of being with his father without the hecklings and expectations of the village and titles that he enjoyed.

"To your mother's memorial." Stoick said. Hiccup hadn't been there in a while. It was a grave of sorts, but since no body of his mother's was ever found, they could never have a proper burial. All that was left was her dagger, her armor, helmetâ€|everything she used to fight with.

Hiccup clicked his tongue before responding, not entirely knowing how to even though it was a very simple request.

"Sureâ€|sure I meanâ€| just you and me?"

Stoick smiled. "Yes, son, just you and me."

"O-Okay." Hiccup couldn't help it, he beamed.

"I'll have Arte call on you tomorrow morning as to when to get ready. So rest up." He slapped his shoulder and stood, brushing off his own shirt as he walked to the door. "Good night, son."

"Night Dadâ€|" Hiccup waved a bit childishly as the king left the room, and he fell back on his pillows, flipping over on his stomach and screaming into his pillow. Whether it was of excitement or frustration wasn't clear, but he screamed into that pillow for another five minutes.

**8,000 words yet again (and I thought this chapter was gonna be shorter, pfft). **

**So some father/son bonding next chapter, and some interesting Toothless/Astrid bonding as well. Lots of good stuff next time.
**

**And for anyone who might've caught the little Hiccup's mother

plot holeâ€|I did change it from the original way/reason she died soâ€|don't freak out.**

**Review Responses: **

**Midnight Dragon Conqueror: I'm sorry but noâ€|that would be major spoilers and to be honest I don't know what chapter. I know **_*_*when **_*_*it happens in the story but not what chapter cause I haven't done chapter planned that far in advance yet. Sorryâ€|enjoy the rest of the story until then though. **

Ferdoos: Well you kinda got some in this chapter. But seriously, this isn't a love storyâ€|soâ€|yeahâ€|not that there can't be romance in it, but that's not the entire point of the story.

92fireDemon: Thank you! Being on a schedule helps keep my butt in check XD

**StorSpeaker: Well I feel like I can't technically answer that without spoiling stuff soâ€|just wait and see. It's pretty obvious Astrid is developing certain feelings, but there's one very big road block holding her back, of course. **

2400shadow: Yeah the dragon attack is coming, but Hiccup's going to try and get his own military's support instead of fighting it off himself with Toothlessâ€|we'll see how well that works out.

Rose: Why hello there fellow rose! And yeah, had to make that movie parallel of him excelling somewhere. And Hiccup's got a lot on his plate, he's not entirely able to really scrutinize Alastair with everything else on his mind. And I'm sure "hmmmâ€|I wonder if Alastair is really a girl" is the last thing on his mind XD

PrayerGirl: Yeah, they're getting there. Astrid is slowly but surely getting used to everything, but she still doesn't want to fly just yet, that's a little too daunting for her. And glad you like long chapters cause all of these chapters are just all seriously longâ€|I don't think I'm capable of writing something under 5,000 anymore XD

Guest (9/1): Yeah, Arte's annoying, but yup he's pretty young. Most of the younger royals of the palace get younger maids cause it's exciting for them to have someone young and hot wait on themâ€|but Hiccup's not particularly amused with his maid, as you can see. And yeah, I love all the relationship progressions so far, as well as Toothless knowing Astrid is a girl. It's kind of hard to hide your gender to animals, even when in disguise. And the whole jealousy thing **_*_*kinda **_*_*happens in this chapter, it won't really be as "in your face" as it would be if Astrid didn't have to keep everything low key due to her being dressed as a boy. Astrid and Hiccup are pretty much joined at the hip at this point, they go and do e_*_*verything **_*_*together. **

**Hannah: Haha, I can't believe I still get messages about FWR, it's amazing how well liked that story was (I cringe at it cause I wrote it so long ago and my writing's gotten sooooo much better since then but still) I go through my withdrawal stuff for avatar all the time,

I wish I had more motivation to write avatar stories more often but it's hard when barely anything new is coming out from the original series anymore. But glad you're like this story as wellâ€|at least people who liked httyd and liked my avatar stories still have something to read from me.**

Guest (9/5): Glad I could be of service with the ages, and glad you like the story!

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

PrinceAleksander: Oh yes, I know I'm blatantly using a leviathan plotline for this story, but I think I mentioned that somewhere in the comments a while back. But yeah, some Leviathan qualities will definitely show up in this story as they already have, mainly in the Hiccup/Astrid stuff.

RoyalToons: Wow more people who read this story and Fire War Renaissance! Glad you like both stories!

**Teen Nightfury: Yeah last chapter was one of those "turning point" chapters. It could only get better or worse from this point, but it won't be like the movie, I can assure you that. And I can answer the Ruffnut in which, she's a looooong ways away. She'll definitely be back but not for a while. The Stoick's reaction was already covered, and it's not really a spoiler that, yes, Hiccup will find out Astrid's true gender (that's just lame if he never finds out) but the how/why/when is the big reveal that I cannot say. It'll be worth the wait though. **

Thanks for all the reviews guys and girls! And I got to 100 reviews! Extra thanks!

See you on October 1**st**** :))**

**Next Chapter: Remembered and Visited **

10. Remembered and Visited

**Okay so the lateness is my goof. I was thinking **_*yesterday
was the first and not the second. And then my perspective drawing teacher basically told me I had to re-draw my entire project so ***BAM**_* all nighter. So, life happens I guess.**

**Good news is, the chapter was already done so as soon as soon as I finished my homework I edited and got it up. Bad news, I've been writing the wrong date on all my papers for the past two days. I need to actually mark off my calendar more. **

**Either way, this chapter has a lot going on in it. A lot of foreshadowingâ€|character development, and the climax of part 1 is looming nearer and nearer so there's lots of new info that's going to be coming in. **

Anyways, enjoy the chapter!

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Ten: Remembered and Visited

It was exactly as Stoick said it would be. Arte came in the room early in the morning, lightly tapping Hiccup awake.

"The king has sent for you to get ready, Prince Hiccup." Arte said softly. Her voice was always calmer now, her demeanor tidy and pecking ever since he won his duel.

"M'kay," Hiccup grumbled and stretched. "Wake up Alastair as well." Arte nodded and knocked at the warrior's door, as it was locked.

Hiccup felt a jolt in his stomach as he got out of bed, still not knowing if he was overwhelmed with frustration or excitement. But since he and his father would be alone for the day, he had to take advantage of the time and just tell him.

Tell him everything about his powers, and his plan, and Toothless. He gulped. His father was so hard headed, what if he didn't listen? What if his plan was only seen as treason and he was banished? Then after all that Snotlout would still rule, the raid would still happen, and nothing among dragons and humans would ever change. He'd still be the useless prince with no respect.

"No, no, stop it Hiccup," Hiccup clutched his head as he muttered to himself.

"Stop what?" Alastair came in, dressed lightly and cloaked as usual.

"My father's taking me on a trip to visit my mother's memorial." Hiccup said.

"Oh? That's great!" Alastair smiled before frowning. "Where is your mother's memorial?"

"It's on her home island, Griggsling. But, it's just going to be me and my dad."

Alastair got an odd twinge in his eye, and Hiccup could relate. They had been joined at the hip for what seemed like forever at that point. Not spending more than an hour or so apart since Alastair was assigned to Hiccup almost two months ago.

"So?" Alastair shifted his weight to his different feet. "What am I supposed to do then?" Hiccup saw a genuine amount of loss in Alastair's eyes and it made him a little sad. Maybe they were too attached?

But then it hit him!

"Hey, why don't you go?" He lowered his voice a bit, looking over at Arte who was getting out his clothes and tidying up his room. Hiccup stood and pushed Alastair into his private room, shutting the door lightly. "Why don't you go to the cove and stay with Toothless? He's been lonely there since we're not going there as often this week."

Alastair shifted his weight uneasily again.

"Iâ€|I don't know." He stuttered. "What if he tries toâ€|eat me or something."

Hiccup let out a good guff of a laugh. "Toothless isn't going to e_at _you, Alastair. Just pleaseâ€|" Hiccup grabbed Alastair's shoulders. "Can you two try and at least be friends?"

Alastair turned a bit red, and looked away, he could tell he didn't want to, his brother's death still affecting his choices.

"Butâ€|" Alastair chewed his lip.

"Alastair pleaseâ€|you two are my friendsâ€|my _only_ friendsâ€| I want us all to get along."

That seemed to soften him. Alastair's shoulder softened, his jaw slacked in exhale.

"Fineâ€|I'll stay with him in the cove todayâ€|"

Hiccup smiled and it was obvious that seeing him happy gave Alastair some kind of relief.

"Are you excited about having some quality time with your dad?" Alastair asked.

Hiccup chewed his lip. "I'mâ€|not sure. I mean, it's great that my dad's warming up to me, butâ€|there's still the plan, and I just don't know how he's going to react."

"Just stay calm when you tell him, and maybe don't mention Toothless just yetâ€|"

"Why not?"

"Well, telling him about the raid and that you can hear dragon's thoughts is going to hit him hard enough. Ease into the secret dragon friendship with a night fury, you know?"

"Yeah," Hiccup sighed, but couldn't help but smile at Alastair's helpful nature. Always with his advice of 'be calm'. He breathed. "Yeahâ€|I knowâ€|"

0o0

They were to travel by boat for 3 hours to the island of Griggsling. The Griggs were more among the hot-blooded of the Viking islands. Keeping in good nature with them was tougher, and on a few occasions civil war to break free from the 'oppression of the Royal Isle's politics' brewed. But never came to complete fruition. The island accepted the changes in the society, the joining of their nation, and even the Roman's influence of the government.

But the marriage of the Chief of Griggsling's daughter to the King-to-be was what helped solidify the peace, even after Valhallarama's death years prior.

The ride there was particularly quiet. As the king promised, it _was just him and Hiccup. No guards, no extra servants or shipmen. Just Hiccup, his father, and the roll of the waves.

Hiccup must've opened his mouth to speak one hundred times, but nothing came out but an awkward squeak, drowned out by the waves crashing upon the side of the boat.

Stoick kept in complete concentration while he rowed, only looking at Hiccup a few times to make sure he hadn't fallen asleep. But Hiccup was too nervous to sleep, his mind reeled, and his nerves were at their very last thread.

'Dad, there's something I have to tell you about the dragonsâ€!' Hiccup ran the preamble in his mind a million times over, nothing sounded good enough. How could he mention dragons once without it being a major fight? Stoick was more about politics, and dragons were like a huge plot hole in his "rise to being a dominate world power". One embarrassment that he couldn't defeat.

"Dadâ€!" Hiccup finally said aloud, just loud enough to come over the sound of the waves and Stoick immediately perked up, giving his son full attention. Hiccup gulped, feeling on display.

"What is it son?" Hiccup sensed the softer tone in Stoick's voice, despite the harsh words of choice.

"Do you everâ€|umâ€|" Hiccup willed himself to keep going, but he had started the sentence off so oddly how could he keep going with such an introduction?

"Do I ever, what?"

"You knowâ€|do you ever want to maybe change something but you don't feel like you can?" It all came out in one breath, almost exhaustingly so. Hiccup bunched his fists into the loose fabric around the knees of his pants.

"Of course," Stoick shrugged, seeming a bit happy at the conversation. "I inherited a rather hard political situation. The islands were at a crossroads of either being separated or joining together and advancing."

"I knowâ€|" Hiccup knew the story well enough. The Romans were once at fear of collapsing completely, but instead they advanced, and other nations began to advance as well. It was all a power struggle, to see who could be in domination first. But the Vikings were particularly unsettled by all being under one king, the idea and political stature of it all never sat well with every island, even as the generations went on. Civil wars, disbands, and rejection of advancement were common. Some wanted to stay in their savagery, and some had no problems rising from the ashes with new ways of government.

Stoick inherited a brewing war that was destined to break out with the Griggs at the forefront, but the marriage of him to Valhallarama saved them from inner breakings. It was something Stoick had no problems bragging about, of course. But Hiccup only felt like he could never live up to that. His father stopped a civil warâ€|. and Hiccup, well, he might very well start one.

"You changed something, son." Stoick continued. "You wanted your birthright and you earned it."

"By winning a duelâ€|" Hiccup almost laughed at how petty the problem sounded compared to his task that day.

"No, by standing up for yourself, taking action when your rights were threatened, training and making sure things went the way you intended. Those are the kinds of qualities a king needs, Hiccup. I'm proud of you."

Hiccup smiled again. Always buttered under the throngs of the society he was about the changeâ€|.

"Thanks Dadâ€|" Hiccup said quietly.

"Though I do think it's time to have that talk." Stoick said.

Hiccup gulped. "Wh-what talkâ€|we already talked about that kind of stuff when I had my first engagement meeting."

Even Stoick shifted uncomfortably at that one. "Another talk." He said, cutting his eyes to the side. "About being Kingâ€|"

"Ohâ€|umâ€|really?" Hiccup had heard Snotlout getting that talk a year ago, he thought it was all over at that point.

"Yesâ€|so we still have an hour left before we get to Griggsâ€|. so let's start off with our affiliation with the Romansâ€|."

0o0

Astrid stayed in her room for a good hour before she decided to just stop stalling and go see Toothless.

The previous night was all the more weird for her, she couldn't get her mind focused on anything, it was going fifty places at once and everything seemed weird and out of place. Despite her odd actions towards Hiccup in general and being hit with a heavy reminder of her brother, the palace was suddenly looking too cramped.

She had been there too long, been with Hiccup too longâ€|maybe the separation between them for the day was good? Her heart had almost dropped when he mentioned they'd be spending the day apart, and that's what annoyed her the most. She had never been so attached to someone, and it made her feel too dependent.

She had been too attached to Atlas, and when he went away it felt like someone had severed her arm, only to find that it would be permanently amputated. She couldn't get too attached to the prince either, especially when he didn't even know who she wasâ€|._what _she was.

Did she really think that she could pull off just being there for him as Alastair and hopefully he wouldn't notice? Or did she think she could tell him andâ€|he just wouldn't care? He'd just adjust to his friend being a girl instead, she'd be just another manipulative woman to himâ€|

She clutched her head again, there her mind wentâ€|racing.

She got fully dressed, put on her cape and went outside, locking her door as now her routine. Arte was changing Hiccup's linens, humming a small tune.

Astrid was almost surprised when Arte didn't try and talk to her, usually she had something underhanded and snarky to say about something _but Astrid simply left the room, not giving any indication that she would be out for the duration of the afternoon, as it seemed too suspicious to begin with.

She had to stay a bit on her toes, now that Snotlout was onto them. She had neglected to tell Hiccup that much, but with his father being back and he weight of his plan already on his shoulders, she felt Snotlout's suspicions was one burden she could shoulder for him.

"Well, hello there Alastair." Astrid heard _his _voice. Speak of the devil. She turned and saw him, his arm was in a sling, shoulder still bandaged off, but he was walking and out of that misery stained roomâ€|he was clearly planning something as she could smell his arrogance a mile away.

"Warrior Duke Snotlout." She bowed respectfully and kept walking, but he grabbed her arm, stopping her. "Am I doing something wrong?"

"Where are you going?"

"Out for a walkâ€|.â€"round the market." She cursed herself for her light stutter. Though she had remembered Hiccup mentioning sending Arte out for more charcoal. She had done so a while ago, butâ€|at least it was something that wasn't too out of the norm. "Prince Hiccup needs some crafting supplies and while he's away I thought I'd fetch them."

"Such a pecking servant you turned out to be." Snotlout jeered and Astrid sucked her teeth.

"I'm not in the mood for this."

"So how does it feel having the prince tied to your apron strings?" Snotlout askedâ€|and Astrid tried to keep walking but her pride was getting to her. "Even when he's not here he's still dangling from them."

"Shut up, Snotloutâ€|" Astrid was starting to see why Hiccup got so provoked by him. "I told you I'm not in the moodâ€|." She heard him continue to egg her on, being joined at the hip with the prince, being a motherâ€|.what would Atlas thinkâ€|.? She couldn't stay there when hearing that, no matter how much her instincts told her to turn around and punch his candle lights out, she kept walking.

She had a real duty to attend to.

Keeping the prince's dragon entertained.

0o0

Astrid kept an eye on things to make sure she wasn't being followed.

But every creak of grass and leaves under her feet or around her made her snap her neck. Even if it was just herself, or an animal making the noise.

She found herself at the cove in another thirty minutes of hiding behind trees and generally being nervous, to find that Toothless was sleeping, as per the usual. It was about high noon at that point, and the sun too warm for comfort.

She moved quietly into the shade near the night fury, he was still dozing but she knew he had to have heard her by now.

"Hiccup said he wouldn't eat me, Hiccup said he wouldn't eat me!" Astrid kept muttering to herself, hoping the thought along would calm her heart, but it only did a tad. She sat in the grass only to have Toothless's eyes snap open and he looked at her almost confusingly so, darting his eyes around as if he were expecting Hiccup.

"Umâ€|Hiccup's not hereâ€|" Astrid said, but could Toothless even understand her? "He's with his father for the day, butâ€|he didn't want you to be lonely soâ€|" Yet she kept talking. Astrid felt stupid, talking to a dragon. But if the Prince could do it, so could she.

Toothless settled back down in his sleeping position, but didn't close his eyes, instead he looked intently at her, waiting for something. Astrid just stared as well, not knowing what to do at that point.

Hiccup always scratched him, or would lean against him and talk for a little while before they went flying. But she couldn't do any of that stuffâ€|.so what kind of bonding did Hiccup expect her and the dragon to be doing?

"Soâ€|I'mâ€|Alastair. Hiccup's friend."

Toothless gave a puff from his nose. Was that an indication that he understood her?

"He wants us to be friends too, andâ€|well I know you two are close now so, we should at least try and be on good termsâ€|for him, you know?"

Toothless glared at her, and she followed her gaze. She had brought her axe with her. Nervous habit. It almost seemed like second nature to bring it along, but thinking now it was a rather silly idea. Toothless clearly didn't like having a weapon that close to him.

"I-I'm not going to hurt youâ€|well, as long as you don't try and hurt me first." She stuttered. But Toothless didn't like that, he growled and began to shift his feet, looking like he was ready to stand. Astrid reared back a big, clutching her axe. "Toothless I'm not going toâ€|this axe belonged to my brother and..." Who was she kidding this dragon couldn't understand her.

But he stopped, and sniffed around her, his nose touching her hair and she shrieked a bit.

Toothless reared back into a sitting position, still squinting his eyes but looking a bit more passive.

"Do you have any siblings?" Astrid asked, running out of ideas. Toothless merely shook his head, thought she couldn't tell if it was an animal reflex or an actual response.

"My brother Atlas was the best older brother a girl could ask for." She smiled fondly, leaning back a bit and felt the dragons' body against her. She jumped up a bit both in the shock of the warm body and the fact that she had called herself a girl. Her eyes bugged and she looked over at Toothless, but he looked hardly effected.

Did he know?

He was a dragon; surely he could already sense the difference between a male and female. No amount of chest binding and loose clothes could cover animal instincts. She gulped.

"Do you know about me?"

Toothless continued to stare.

"Come on Toothless!" She raised her voice in a desperate whine. "I know you know something; just please tell me you haven't told Hiccup. Please."

The dragon's eyes were serious and he bowed his head, it seemed like a humble move; like a "no".

Astrid drew her knees up to her chest, curling in her own warmth. "He can't know, Toothless, at least not now; please promise me you won't say anything to him. I want to be the one to tell him whenever that'll be."

Another bow.

She smiled against her knee.

"Thank you," She didn't know what just happened, but it seemed some kind of communication was possible. At least she hoped she was getting the correct interpretation of what he was doing, but it seemed that if he was so into smiting her by revealing such a secret he would've been more distant. Instead Toothless moved a bit, curling around her.

She pressed her back to him, timidly, but it was a start. She could tell Toothless was trying, if anything, for the sake of Hiccup's want for them to be on good terms. She reached forward and gave him two light, and awkward pats. Toothless winced a bit, but otherwise stayed still, placing his head down comfortably, but keeping his eyes open to listen to her.

Astrid sighed, and continued talking. Might as well give him something to listen to;

0o0

The rocks of the Griggs' rough waters broke against the ship and interrupted Hiccup and Stoick's talk on the political intrigues of

being king.

Hiccup could practically feel his head spinning. The amount of traveling to different islands all for the sake of checking up, keeping tabs on the entire delivery system between all the islands, keeping up with the other world powers, improving the government system by intensive studies on what the other governments were doingâ€¦

Hiccup looked up to the sky. All he wanted to do was fly on Toothless again. The sea breeze supped through his hair and he closed his eyes, he loved that breezeâ€¦ the fresh smell only made him want to reunite with the sky even more.

Before he knew it the boat hit the shore, and a few Grigg men were awaiting the King's arrival.

"Welcome, King Stoick," they all bowed and greeted. Hiccup walked from behind him. "And the little King-to-Be," they added, and bowed again.

Hiccup swallowed, more impressed at how quickly word spread about the duel than by the 'king-to-be' title he was referred to.

They met their first destination after a long walk through the Grigg's market. Some of them bowed, others spat at the ground they walked on. The Griggs civilians weren't always as generous as their presiding chiefs.

Hiccup looked up at the old house they were going to, the Grigg's elder, and Hiccup's grandfather on his mother's side. A skinny old man, living well beyond the average life expectancy. Old Wrinkly is what Hiccup had always called him, anything else seemed wholly unnatural.

"Remember to be respectful to your grandfather, and don't regale him with too many 'thrilling' details," Stoick rambled on, it was the same old speech every time they went to see him. "You know of his age," Stoick continued, nonetheless.

"â€"Any unplanned excitement might be the end, I know Dadâ€|I know." Hiccup rolled his eyes, and he tapped lightly on the door.

"Who's that at the Thor-forsakenâ€?" Old Wrinkly opened the door with a forceful swing. Hiccup always felt it silly when Stoick continually brought up his age like he was frail. Old Wrinkly had a fire within him that just never seemed to go out. "Ah, Stoick and Hiccup. Nice of you to send word before you're coming here. You know it scares the sanity out of me when I get unexpected visitors."

"Nice to see you too." Stoick gave a light sigh but otherwise let himself in. Hiccup went right after, giving his grandfather a smile only to be taken off by the weird look he was giving him.

"So, what have you been up to, little Hiccup?" Old Wrinkly asked, though he seemed to be waiting for him to answer in a specific way then simply waiting for any old answer.

"Umâ€|I won a duel against Snotloutâ€|." Hiccup shrugged. Though he

knew word had already spread to Griggs about it, sometimes Old Wrinkly was too busy with spiritual things to make it to every news report.

"Still wish I had seen it," Stoick gave another sigh, but the proud smile on his face whipped it away.

"You two are going to see Val's memorial, right?" Old Wrinkly asked and Stoick nodded. "Well then, why don't you go get the burn sticks and spark rocks from the back room, we can take it with us."

Old Wrinkly simple waved his cane as Stoick left before turning back to Hiccup, taking his shoulders in his arm and turning him towards the town in a whisper.

"Now, boyâ€|what have you been up to?" The old man asked again, and the weedy smell of his breath made Hiccup dizzy and confused all at the same time. His heart leaped a little. No one could possibly know about Toothlessâ€|. especially someone all the way in Griggs.

"Nothing much, Old Wrinklyâ€|. just trying to stay out of trouble."

"Ah, with that protector your father gave you," Old Wrinkly gave out a laugh. "Haha, he doesn't know the half of it."

"Old Wrinklyâ€|" Hiccup detangled himself from the old man's grasp. "What are you talking aboutâ€|how do you even know about Alastair?"

"I think the better question is whatdo you know about Alastairâ€|.?"

Hiccup blinked. "Have you been chewing that grass that's in the forests againâ€|?" Hiccup groaned. "Old Wrinkly, you know that stuff makes you crazyâ€|."

"Fah!" Old Wrinkly waved his cane again, dismissing the question before taking Hiccup's arm and lifting his heavy brows, his eyes were bloodshot, crazy. "Listen to me Hiccup." Old Wrinkly shook him a little. "You listeningâ€|?"

Hiccup nodded quickly.

"You need to get out of here while you still canâ€|there's nothing you can do about it now."

"Aboutâ€|what?" Hiccup stuttered. He couldn't connect the dots sometimes when Old Wrinkly spoke. He'd speak in a tense that made you think he had been to the future and back, which while most spiritual experts spoke this way, he still couldn't wrap his mind about it. He simply wasn't used to it with Berk's spiritual elderâ€|"Gothiâ€|"being so silent.

He tried to think of all the things the old man could be referring to, and while it made sense for him to know about Toothlessâ€|the dragon warâ€|he feared anyone else but Alastair knowing too much to even consider it further.

Yet still he asked.

"You meanâ€|the dragon's plansâ€|.?"

Old Wrinkly gave a smile of relief. "Don't try and stop it yourselfâ€|take the girl, the night fury, and get out of here."

"The girlâ€|what girlâ€|? And get out of whereâ€|.?"

"Alright got the burning sticks." Stoick entered the room again. Old Wrinkly gave another interjection before distancing himself from Hiccup and making it over to Stoick.

"Alright then, lads, let's go see Valâ€|"

0o0

Hiccup chewed his lips until they peeled the whole walk to his mother's memorial. His weight felt off now that he was aware Old Wrinkly knew about his interactions with Toothless.

Soothsayers had an uncanny way of watching over others, and having one in their family meant the Haddocks were always being watched by their spiritual superior. He had forgotten most of the time, as he never did anything too note worthy but embarrass himself. Old Wrinkly, even then, had told Hiccup to stay strong as his time to shine was comingâ€|. He had always thought he meant that he was meant to be King one day, but maybe this was what he was talking aboutâ€|?

But then, why'd he tell him to leave because there was nothing he could doâ€|?

Still, Hiccup felt uneasy. Knowing that Old Wrinkly knew only made him telling Stoick more inevitable. He had to do it that day, before someone else told him. If word was already spreadingâ€|Alastair and Toothless might've been in dangerâ€|.

What if the entire day he was spending away from Berk was a ploy to capture Toothlessâ€|. !?

"Dadâ€|!" Hiccup gasped, lost in his own thoughts and practically screaming with the panic of his mind being released.

Stoick and Old Wrinkly turned around hastily, but only with smiles on their faces.

"We're here, Son." Stoick said, and Hiccup saw the vast expanse of meadow before him with a stone memorial rising from the swaying grass.

Valhallarama, Mother, Queen, Dearly missed and never truly goneâ€|.

It was about as sweet as sentiment as any Viking would get on a memorial tomb. Hiccup stared at it with hallow eyes. He barely knew his mother compared to other boys relationships with their mothers. In fact, on many occasions he feared he'd forget her personality beyond her legend entirely. She was more of a figure of admirationâ€|a far away stature of greatness, than his own mother.

Looking at the memorial was like watching Atlas's body get buried among the other warriorsâ€|a downed heroâ€|

Old Wrinkly placed down the burn sticks and took the spark rocks to ignite them. A small string of smoke emerged, smelling chai of incense, and Stoick bowed before the stones, head down and silent.

Hiccup watched respectfully as he stood next to Old Wrinkly.

"You have a lot more in common with your mother than you thinkâ€|" Old Wrinkly said quietly. Hiccup just eyed him softly, not having the courage to ask him what _that _meant.

But at least with the old man there, Hiccup didn't have to face telling Stoick about the dragons just yetâ€|.and for that he was thankful. He simply stood in his own silent respects while the chai of the smoke filled his nostrils. One side of his mind so focused on his task, the other trying to process what his grandfather meant, but nothing settled his stomach.

Oo0

Stoick stayed at the grave for almost two hours before all the burn sticks had charred away. Hiccup had long sense sat down, playing with the grass and generally running through his mind ways to gain the courage to have the conversation he needed to with his father on the way homeâ€|

Old Wrinkly, surprisingly, stood the whole timeâ€|eyes closed, and taking in the air. He was probably meditating, Hiccup concluded.

Hiccup took a good look at the memorial as Stoick backed away, he took out his dagger. The one he's used to protect himself from Toothlessâ€|and Snotlout. He dug it into the stone at the side, and carved some simple words in the stoneâ€|

Thank you for giving me strengthâ€|

Stoick placed a hand on his shoulderâ€|and they all made their way back to Old Wrinkly's house.

"What were you meditating about, Old Wrinkly?" Hiccup asked quietly, slacking in his pace to stand beside his grandfather on the trek home.

Old Wrinkly was silent for a few moment, rustling his voice in his throat a few times before responding.

"If I were youâ€|.I wouldn'tâ€|" Old Wrinkly said. He never met eyes with Hiccup as he stared blindly forward, like he was seeing into another world, and, knowing Old Wrinkly, he probably was.

"Wouldn't whatâ€|?" Hiccup asked. He felt a bit dump for continually questioning everything, but he had to be sure he and Old Wrinkly were on the same page.

"Wouldn'tâ€|" the old man lowered his voice. "Tell your father."

Hiccup chewed his lip. Jumping at the chance to simply agree and forget it. It saved him much stress, but what would it really accomplish?

"What good is it to run off and leave?" Hiccup asked, keeping his voice low as well. "Then everyone's blood will be on my hands because I knew about it beforehand. Me and Toothlesâ€"me and the night fury can stop it, I know we canâ€|"

"You're a foolish boy, the only blood that's going to be on your hands is your own. You're no match for them nowâ€|they'll pick you clean."

"But I canâ€|" Hiccup's voice rose a bit and Stoick turned.

"What are you two whispering about?" Stoick asked.

"Teenage stuff, the boy's having some of that teenage drama!" Old Wrinkly said quickly and loudly.

The old man was a master at excuses.

Stoick turned back around and continued walking, but kept cutting his eyes over his shoulder.

They both knew to wrap up the conversation, but Hiccup had one last thing to ask.

"How much do you knowâ€|?" Hiccup simply asked. His stomach flopped again. It was so odd, talking about dragons to someone who wasn't Alastair or Toothless.

Another long period of silence. Old Wrinkly's house cleared the hilltop and the sun began to set upon it.

"Ah, looks like sunset is heading our way," Stoick observed. "Sorry to cut this visit short, Old Wrinkly, but we should be heading back before it gets dark at sea."

"No problem, my boy, you and the little Hiccup have a safe trip back." Old Wrinkly turned to his grandson one last time, touching his shoulder roughly. Hiccup looked up at the old man, still waiting for an answer.

"You're going to be facing your ability for the rest of your life, Hiccup," Old Wrinkly started. "I've known since you were born that you'd have itâ€|just make sure that no matter what you keep the night fury and the girl by your side and everything will work out as prophesized."

Prophesizedâ€|? Hiccup wondered but had no time to ask. It seemed like a question with an extensive answer, and he wasn't sure he could take anymore. So Hiccup only nodded as Stoick called out to him.

"Thanks Old Wrinkly!" Hiccup called out as he boarded the boat, watching the old man fade into the hilltops as the boat rolled further and further away from the shore.

0o0

"You seemed distracted today, Sonâ€|" Stoick said, tapping his hands against the ores as he rowed. "Are your 'teenage problems' really that bad?"

Hiccup swallowed. He did have teenage problems, but he knew his father was more or less ready to talk about girl issues, not dragon issues.

He mulled over Old Wrinkly's words. He told him not to tell Stoickâ€|and to take Toothless and run. Toothless and a_ girl_. Hiccup was still fuzzy on that part. Was there a girl in the palace who knew? Was itâ€"he shuddered to thinkâ€"Arte? And what prophecy was he speaking ofâ€|one that he had to run away from apparentlyâ€|?

"Though come to think of it," Stoick continued as Hiccup stayed silent. "I never see you with any girls around the island, you're mostly just going off with Alastair when you can. You need to start getting out of your comfort zone, son."

"Alastair'sâ€|one of the first real friends I've ever hadâ€|." Hiccup said softly. And it was true. If it wasn't for Toothless and Alastair, he wouldn't know how far gone he'd be. He looked out into the water, wondering if those two really were getting alongâ€|?

"Ah, I see, a little separation anxiety, eh?" Stoick laughed a bit. "Well I can imagine the boy'd be a bit clingy, after what happened to his cousin and all."

"Right," Hiccup nodded, remember that to everyone Atlas was still just Alastair's cousin. "But I wonder if it scares himâ€|to be a warrior like hisâ€|_cousin _after what happened?"

"Sometimes history doesn't always repeat itself." Stoick said. "Every Hiccup in our family has brought shame to the Haddock nameâ€|but not you, Hiccup. You're shaping up to be a fine lad."

"You think I'll be a good kingâ€|?" Hiccup asked timidly.

"Ayeâ€|I do." Stoick said, not a moment's hesitation in his voice.

The simple words alone gave Hiccup a sense of purpose, but he couldn't grab the good feeling entirely. Old Wrinkly's warnings stayed within him, his duty lingered, and his need to just be with Toothless and Alastair tucked away in the cove wrapped him.

"Thanks dadâ€|for taking me out today."

Stoick let out a breath, seeming uneasy about his words. "Eh, wellâ€|I know things have been rough between us for a good long while, son. It's hardâ€|being a father, you know."

"Especially with a son like meâ€|" Hiccup muttered to himself but Stoick seemed to hear him.

"It's hard being a father to any son. I just want to keep you safe. After what happened to your mother I can'tâ€|"

Hiccup's eyes widened. Stoick didn't need to finish the sentence for Hiccup to know that his father was trying to say he couldn't lose him as well. But he had locked him away in his room, prevented him from living for so long. Like he was a fragile little bird, locked in a cage for safety but ultimately unable to spread its wings and just be the bird it was. In some ways, he could never forgive his father for that wasted time, but in other waysâ€¦he had to.

"I know, but Dad, I can take care of myselfâ€¦at least, to a certain degree. You've got to give me more chances to prove it. You just have to trust me."

"I know sonâ€¦." Stoick looked out to the ocean as the conversation faded. "I knowâ€¦"

And it was then he realized that his grandfather was right. He couldn't tell Stoickâ€¦not that day. Though he wasn't entirely sure when or even_ if_ but he needed more time to figure things out.

Hiccup only hoped he _had _that time.

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Once Hiccup got back to his room he found a cleaning Arte yet no Alastair. He felt odd, seeing Arte there and took a good long look at her before speaking up. _Did _she know about him and Toothless? It would make sense in some degrees that she would be nosy and figure out. But Old Wrinkly had told him to take the girl with himâ€¦did that mean Arte would become an ally of his?

"Have you seen Alastair, Arte?" Hiccup asked, taking off his cape.

"He's been out all day, odd since you're not around, but I guess he had to have had some kind of life before he got stuck with you." Arte said. Despite fawning over him in the bath, certain attitudes still slipped out. Hiccup's nose wrinkled. He _really _hoped Arte wasn't the girl Old Wrinkly was talking about.

Hiccup went to put on his rougher boots. "He's probably just in the market," he covered, as he knew Alastair must've still been in the cove. "I'll go get him." Hiccup said and was out the door just as quickly as he came in.

Walking through the woods alone and at night was hardly a favorite activity of Hiccup's, but it was worth it to finally make it to the clearing of the cove and see Alastair leaning against Toothless, rattling on in conversation.

He stopped to take in the scene of his two friends finally getting along without him there with a smile before approaching. He gave out a sigh of relief as well, glad that his going away with his father _wasn't _a plot to capture Toothless.

He stepped closer and Toothless perked up in attention at the first sense of him. He had happy rolls to his throat, jumping up and nudging against his side. Hiccup gladly pet him.

:::Nice to know you missed me,:: Hiccup said. _:::I missed you tooâ€|but at least it seems you and Alastair are getting along well.::_

On cue Alastair walked up, smiling as well.

"Welcome home, my Prince." He said in a stately fashion.

"Hey Alastair," Hiccup smiled. "Thanks so much forâ€"" he gestured to Toothless "â€"well you know."

"No problem, it was a little weird at first, but we did bond a little. That is, assuming Toothless understood a word I was saying."

:::I did.:: Toothless said. _:::Your friend spoke more today than any other day.::_

Hiccup chuckled. "He understood you, Alastair." But Alastair seemed a bit worried at that fact, his face dropped.

Toothless continue to nudge his nose into Hiccup's side, the want to fly strong between both of them.

:::Oh yeah, you've been grounded all dayâ€|wanna stretch your wings?:::

Toothless could only give a growling assurance and Hiccup turned to Alastair.

"Why don't you go on back to the palace, Alastair?" Hiccup suggested. "We can catch up when I get backâ€!"

Alastair simply raised a brow, not looking convinced.

"I'll be fine, but it's late and me and Toothless will be flying for at least an hour."

"I can wait," Alastair said, but it was all dampened by his yawn.

"Alastair," Hiccup groaned.

"I said I can wait, it's bad enough I lost track of time and you had to come through the woods all on your own." Alastair sighed. "I still am your protector, you know."

Hiccup gave a sigh as well. "Or, you know, you could come flying with us." He poked at again.

"Hiccup," Alastair groaned.

"Alastair," Hiccup matched the boy's tone. "Flying on Toothless isn't dangerous and you know I'm not going to let anything happen to you while we're up there."

"I said _no_."

"Is it because of Atlasâ€|that you don't want to flyâ€|?" Hiccup just jumped in and asked, though as soon as he brought it up he bit his

tongue, regretting it.

Alastair's face went paler, looking almost ghostly in the moonlight. Hiccup stepped forward, arms reaching out.

"Alastair, I'm sorry Iâ€"

"Forget it," Alastair stopped, crossing his arms over his chest and turning.

_:::Stop it, human::: _Toothless interjected. _:::You don't need to force it._:

_:::Iâ€|I knowâ€|::: Hiccup said. He reached out to touch Alastair's shoulder but drew back, giving him his space. "Me and Toothless will be back later thenâ€|you be safe here tooâ€|"

"I will." Alastair simply sat down, sharpening his axe with a rock he quickly picked up from the ground.

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Hiccup and Toothless simply hovered higher above the clouds that night, the stars drawing them both up higher and higher.

_:::And then he told me to take you and this girl and leaveâ€|::: Hiccup finished, recalling what Old Wrinkly had said to him.

_:::How are humans able to know such things when they live such a distance from each otherâ€|?::: _Toothless asked, not for the first time in the conversation. _:::It seems beyond their mental capacity._:

:::It's all about contacting certain spirits and having good relations with them so that they let you see things normal humans can't.: He tried his best to explain, though he barely understood himself.

_:::And the girlâ€|::: _Toothless continued. _:::Do you know what that meansâ€|?::: _

Hiccup sensed the same quality in Toothless's voice as Old Wrinkly back on Griggs. Like he was searching for a specific answer rather than expecting any answer. He tried to search the night fury's mind for what he thinking about, but he had that certain cavern blocked.

Still, Hiccup wondered how he was able to block off certain thoughtsâ€|and wished he could do the same sometimes.

:::I can't really say I know what it meansâ€|maybe someone else on the island knows about this? But I don't really know who else would know me that well but maybe Arteâ€|and I hope it's not her.:

:::The one who serves you?:::

:::Yeah.:

Toothless let out an exasperated groan.

::About your friendâ€|: Toothless quickly changed the subject.
::We should do something for her.:

::Well, for starters you could stop referring to Alastair like he's a girl.: Hiccup let out a laugh. _::He'd probably explode if he knew you were doing that._:

::Her role to you is very femaleâ€|Like a mother.: Toothless tried to explain, a part of his mind, Hiccup could feel, was still blocked.

::I know but it's just weirdâ€|: Hiccup looked to the side, narrowing his eyes. He already hated that Toothless w_as _right that Alastair was like his mother most of the time. He knew it was because of the protector's role Alastair was placed under, and they were growing in their friendship, but still Hiccup wondered what would happen after Alastair was promoted to a King's Warrior? He wouldn't have to be his protector anymoreâ€|would their friendship fade when they weren't ordered to be togetherâ€|?

::You two won't be separated so easily.: Toothless said, clearly reading his thoughts. _::She cares for you more than you know._:

—
Hiccup smiled.

::Is that what you two talked about while I was away?:

::Among other thingsâ€|: Toothless paused for a moment.
::Alsoâ€|about missing her brother.:

Hiccup felt a jolt in his stomach. He knew Alastair was probably sitting in the cove, thinking about Atlas.

::I want to do somethingâ€|: Toothless said.

::For Alastair?:

::Yes, we should do something to lift her spirits. She has a lot of turbulence in her mind. And I don't need to read it to tell.:

Hiccup blinked a few times, wondering how deep Toothless's mind reading really _did _go. But even he just said he couldn't read Alastair's mindâ€|

And just then the though came into his mind.

::I've got it!: Hiccup smiled. _::I know what we can do for him._:

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Astrid found the rest of the night to be one long, continuous minute.

Hiccup and Toothless returned after an hour as promised and she and Hiccup had a silent walk back home. She simply wasn't in the mood for talking, but because Hiccup kept a smile plastered on his face the

whole way back she couldn't be too grouchy.

Seeing him happy like that always gave her at least a fraction of joy.

She was rather off sorts, though, because of Hiccup's comment that Toothless did understand what she was saying. She knew he had to have some kind of understanding to even communicate but did he understand every word in clarity? Even about her being a girlâ€¦?

Well then he had to have known that she didn't want him to tell Hiccup, but would heâ€¦? She had no way of knowing Toothless would blab until it was too late.

The thought gave her a punched feeling.

When they returned home she quickly fell asleep, the lonely echoes in her stone room comforting her like they never had. She was content in being locked up that night, all her secrets were safe within her.

That morning Astrid woke up feeling more rested than she anticipated. Which she knew she'd need if she was going to listen to the highlights of Hiccup's day with his father.

But as she rose from her room, fully dressed for the day she saw that Hiccup was not in the room.

"Prince Hiccup!?" Astrid called, looking in the smithy but not finding him there either. It wasn't like him to not be in his room or the smithy in the morning. She hardly believed that he would go get them breakfastâ€¦ or go to the bath alone with all the girls there ready to pounce.

Just as she was ready to leave in search for him she opened the door and found Hiccup mid-stride in entering. He had two breakfast plates in his hands.

Astrid grinned widely, feeling a bit honored that the prince would bring her breakfast, but then she got a better look at him. His boots were muddy, his eyes had bags under them, and he smelled of forest vegetation.

"Good morning Alastair I got youâ€""

"You were with Toothless all night weren't you?" Astrid interrupted, placing a hand on her hip before ripped it off. That wasn't a very manly gesture. "Hiccup you know how dangerous it is for you to be out all night in the forest, what if there were dragons patrolling? You need to tell me whenâ€""

"Okay, okay," Hiccup walked in the room and shut the door with his foot, placing the plates on his bed. "Yes I snuck back out once you were asleep, but I got you breakfast to make up for it. The first cuts of everything."

Astrid look over at her plate. It was the good meat. And she knew how much Hiccup hated meat and to stand around waiting for it to be cut in the morningâ€¦

"And I had a good reason." Hiccup continued.

"Like what?"

"Well it's a surprise so I'll show you after we finish breakfast."

"A surprise?" Astrid blinked. First breakfast and now a surprise? Still, she smiled, sitting on his bed and taking a slab of meat from the plate. It tasted fresh, juicy. Getting the first cuts was always the best.

Hiccup sat beside her, eating his smaller portions of vegetables and fish, still grinning much too widely. What did he have planned?

After they finished breakfast Hiccup was pushy enough to get her to immediately go into the forest. She figured they were going to the cove but instead he said Toothless was already at the place where the "surprise" was. He took her a little deeper in the forest than she was used to and halfway through he gave her a blindfold.

"Um, no." Astrid said firmly. "I need to see where I'm going."

"I'll lead you." Hiccup grinned.

"No."

"Alastair!" Hiccup pouted, holding out the blindfold but she still wasn't going to budge. "Come on I'm trying to do something nice for you for once, at least cooperate a little bit."

Astrid bit her lip, tapping her boot down against a pebble on the ground. He was trying to be nice, she supposed. She grabbed the blindfold harshly and tied it around her eyes, holding out her hand and sweating a bit. Was he going to hold her hand the entire way? Wasn't that a little odd since they were bothâ€?

But he went behind her and grabbed her shoulders instead, shoving her forward as he walked.

"I won't run you into a tree," Hiccup joked. "Promise."

"Haha," Astrid mocked in a droll tone, wanting to smack herself, yet again, for getting all flustered. Even as they walked the proximity was getting to her. She could feel her face heating up and almost sang praises to the gods when Hiccup announced that they were finally there.

His hands left her shoulders and she heard him walk in front of her and Toothless happily step forward.

"Okayâ€!" Hiccup said. "You can take off the blindfold."

She did so, slowly, wanting to prolong any "surprise" she was getting. But what she found was not what she was expecting in the least sense.

She saw a memorial for Atlas. The stones around the tree were carved,

flowers and a warrior's helmet was perched atop it.

Astrid covered her mouth, as she saw the area where an engrave should've been was left blank. But Hiccup stepped forward, handing her his mother's dagger.

"Here, carve whatever you'd like!"

Astrid felt stupid when a tear rolled down her eye, but she simply couldn't help it.

"You!" she tried to speak, but her voice was too high pitched for her to continue. She looked at Toothless, looking as happy as Hiccup was. "You both!"

"Believe it or not it was Toothless's idea go co something for you." Hiccup mentioned, and, boldly, he took a hand from her mouth, and placed the dagger in it. "I'm just! I'm sorry about what I said before. I shouldn't have brought up Atlas!" he half chuckled to himself. "You'd think that after you shoved me down last time that I'd learned my lesson, but I guess I'm still just a selfish prince, and...I'm sorry. If you're not comfortable flying Toothless yet then you don't have to."

Astrid could only nod. A million gestures and words went through her head. She wanted to take his hand and thank him, or hug him or!.

But she couldn't do any of those things! so she simply looked at the memorial that Hiccup and Toothless had spent so much time making. All night, in fact. All this time she had felt she was betraying Atlas by being involved, but no one understood the dynamics of life like Hiccup and Toothless did. They appreciated it so much they defied society to live it to the fullest.

That Hiccup, in his position, could make this for her. And that _Toothless _could make a memorial for someone who killed dragons!.

"Can I! Can I just be alone for a few moments?" She finally said. Her voice was still too high pitched, but she could blame it on the crying.

Both Hiccup and Toothless left without another word, going into the forest a short distance away to give her some space.

She grasped the dagger firmly but looked at the memorial stone.

"You finally got the honor you deserve, Atlas." She said to the stone. "I know they probably just threw you in a burial with all the other dead bodies! but at least now you can breathe a little even if your body's not here. It's peaceful in this forest! and I know how much you like peace! that's why you were fighting."

Another tear!

"But," she continued. "It just pains me that you died for a reason you didn't have to. Dragons! they're not so bad. I know one, I guess I'm almost friends with one. And he's got a heart, he wants peace and non-violence just like you did. So I'm just sorry, that you couldn't

live long enough to learn that. But, I hope that having Toothless help build this showed you that dragons can do good too!"

She lifted the dagger and began carving into it. It was a private note and a risk, but she couldn't put something fake on there. It simply didn't feel right.

She walked a little ways into the forest, finding Hiccup and Toothless simply leaning against the trees, a little too casually. She walked over to Toothless and gave him a light pat. He purred happily.

"Thank you both of you!" She said softly. "I'm glad that Atlas can be somewhere in peace now." She looked off to the side, fearing her next words. "But can I just ask that you not look at what I wrote on the memorial? It's very private and I'd just respect that you didn't look."

Hiccup blinked a few times, though Toothless didn't look surprised. The boy and the dragon seemed to share a conversation with their eyes. Hiccup looked unsure. Toothless convinced him otherwise. Hiccup agreed.

Astrid realized it was getting a bit easier to read those two just by how they looked at each other. Their eyes were both very expressive.

"Alright, Alastair if that's what you want, I'll respect that." Hiccup finally said.

Astrid walked over to him, and placed the dagger in his hand, but clasped it with both of her hands, squeezing tightly. She bowed her head to him, letting her hair fall more in front of her eyes.

"Thank you, Hiccup." She said again. "And you're wrong, you know you're not just a selfish prince, you a good friend my best friend."

"I've never had friends before," Hiccup said hoarsely. "But I'm glad that all of us can just be honest with each other."

The words jabbed her, and she clutched his hand tighter momentarily before letting go. He had to drop the honesty bomb.

She wasn't being honest with him. And she wouldn't let him look at what she wrote because she signed her real name on the stone, not Alastair.

How could she even begin to make it up to him?

"Well, um, we should head back to the cove!" Hiccup suggested in the wake of the silence. "Me and Toothless wanna fly around a little more today since we haven't been able to!"

She stayed silent, thinking heavily about her next words, her next move.

"Or you could stay here if you want to be alone with Atlas some more?" He shifted nervously on his feet, waiting for her reply.

"Noâ€|" She said first. Her hands were shaking, but she had to do this. She raised her head, looking him straight in the eyes no matter how much it made her heart pound.

For him..for Toothlessâ€|for Atlas. She had to bridge the gap.

"I'll goâ€|I'll go flying with you and Toothless."

**Well 10 chapters in and Astrid finally gets her butt on a dragon.
**

Romantic flight? Perhapsâ€|you all will have to wait until next chapter (evil laugh).

Reviews:

**Storspeaker: Those are some interesting questions. It's fun to see where people **_*think* **_*this story is going, but I was aiming for a shock value at the end of part one as to where it was heading so, I think it's going to be for the most part. And yeah, Astrid's definitely developing "feelings" for Hiccup. It's a driving force in the story. **

Ferdoos: Well I **_*do* **_*ship hiccstrid. Just this is gonna be a pretty long story, so it's all evenly paced out. I don't think hiccstrid shippers will be completely disappointed with the story, but they might have to wait a bit. There's plenty of little goodies along the way, though.

Necro-wulf: That **_*is* **_*an interesting idea. But the story is about 5 or 6 acts/parts long, soâ€|I really don't wanna spoil how much or little of what you said may or may not be in what I have planned. But it makes me happy that people put so much thought into my dinky little story XD

2400shadow: Yeah, this chapter had a lot going on in it, lots of foreshadowing and development, and turning points for our main characters. Good stuff. But Part 1 is coming up on its "grand climax" so, stuff is going to keep building from here on out.

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

92fireDemon: Thank you, I aim for solidarity!

Guest 9/16: Yeah, I threw you all a hiccstrid bone, cause everyone's been asking for me. That scene wasn't in the original conception for the chapter but it all worked out. And during the sleeping scene she actually was thinking about both. She fell asleep on Hiccup thinking about him and then drifted off to thinking about Atlasâ€|they're both prominent males in her life that have made an impact on how she looks at life she it's natural she connects the two. And thank you, I'm trying to update sooner, but I had a oopsie moment by mixing up the dates this time DX

TeenNightfury: Ehhhh, I wish I could answer that, but you'll just have to keep reading to find out!

**Guest 9/17: Yep, this story does take elements from the Leviathan

series. That's my favorite book series and when making this story it seemed right to put Astrid in a Deryn-type situation. They're characters are pretty alike to me. Just as Hiccup shares a lot of similarities to Alek. **

**PrayerGirl: Yep, this chapter was about 8-9,000 so, yeahâ€|that's basically the span of most of the chapters. I actually had to shave this one down a bit because it running on too long. And hoped you liked the development in this chapter as well, cause there was a lot of it. **

Thanks for all the reviews everyone! Again sorry for the mix up on dates, I shall make a note to myselfâ€|and actually keep up with my calendar for next update on the 15**th****!**

Next Chapter: Captured and Questioned

11. Captured and Questioned

Well, despite how horribly busy I was today I still got this up on the actual day (I marked my calendar)! And, I've gotta say, I really enjoyed this chapter.

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Eleven: Captured and Questioned

Hiccup felt a bit bad for listening to Alastair's conversation at the memorial. He had every intention of going deep enough into the forest so that he wouldn't hear, but Toothless lingeredâ€|so then did he. He never saw what he carved, but he heard every word.

Still, he felt a flutter in his stomach for finally having Alastair understand things the way he did. It was the unexpected success of the occasion as he still hadn't been able to break the news to his father.

But when Alastair finally agreed to flyâ€|he almost could've fainted.

_::She's going to flyâ€|?::_Toothless asked, seeming just as shocked. But the look in Alastair's eyes was dead serious. It was rare Hiccup got a straight look from him in the first place. Alastair always had one side of his face covered by hair the other always downcast. He wasn't very big on casual eye contact, but whenever Hiccup did get a glance in Alastair's eyes they always seemed troubled or worried. What kinds of things did he hide behind those eyes of his? Hiccup wondered.

He had said that he was glad they could all be honest with each other, but he always felt that Alastair was hiding something. He had hid the fact that Atlas was his brother for some reason, always slept aloneâ€|never made eye contactâ€|he tried to connect dots but Hiccup's mind simply would never let him go any further than the suspicions.

And he could feel Toothless's frustration over it.

Still Hiccup blinked at the boy's request. "Umâ€|sure, you

canâ€| sure!"

"Alright," Alastair fidgeted a bit awkwardly in his boots, looking downwards yet again. "What should I do?"

"Justâ€|" Hiccup quickly mounted Toothless and held out a hand. "Hop on."

Alastair reached out, but then pulled his hand back and bit his lip. He was so closeâ€|

"Come on Alastair, like I said, I'm not going to let anything happen to you up there, alright?"

Still he stood there.

"You do trust me, right?" he added, and felt a bit satisfied for finally seeing the words register in Alastair's mind. He reached forward again, still hesitating but Hiccup simply grabbed his wrist the rest of the way, and hauled him towards the saddle.

Toothless sat on the ground completely, making it easier for Alastair to climb on. He sat rather far back on the saddle, keeping their bodies far apart.

"Okay, umâ€| I know this is gonna be awkward but you have to hold onto me. Or else you'll fall off." Hiccup mentioned and when he saw Alastair's eyes grow dark he let out a sigh. It wasn't his favorite part about potentially flying with a partner either, but he wanted to protect Alastair more than make it particularly comfortable.

Alastair scooted forward, almost a little too quickly, and secured his arms around his waist, burying his face into his shoulder.

"Umâ€|" Hiccup swallowed.

"If I look I'll screamâ€| just go already." Alastair muffled into his shirt, and Hiccup nodded.

_:::Feeling tense?:::_Toothless asked. _:::We've never flown with a passenger._:::_

:::It'll be fine, just take it easy, okay? No need to scare Alastair more than he already is.:::_

Toothless agreed, and walked over to the cliff side of the forest, looking down at the rock below before casting his gaze up in the air.

It was a clear enough day for a calm flight.

_:::Ready?:::_Toothless made sure.

_:::Ready,:::_Hiccup concurred, and the three took offâ€|

0o0

Astrid cursed herself the second she felt them embark. Her stomach

floated beneath her skin, her organs feeling weightless and dizzying. Her fingers dug deep into Hiccup's skin. He wasn't very muscular, and didn't even have too much fat, so all she was met with was a light resistance of skin and bones under her fingers, but still she dug.

She wouldn't allow herself to look up yet. They were still ascending, and she'd rather look down and see the sky as tiny then see it gradually get smaller. She kept her face buried in Hiccup's shoulder. The loose cloth of his tunic smelt like he had been working all night, it was sweaty and dusted over in dirt, but she still breathed it in. It wasn't very often she'd be able to be this close to him without it being weird, and thinking about that calmed her a bit before she felt them level off.

Whew, she thought, she had managed to get through the entire lift off without screaming.

"You alright back there?" Hiccup asked. His voice was slightly buried by the ringing in her ears, and his neck and hair pressed against her left ear. "You can look now," Hiccup told her, but she still kept her face buried. Hiccup's shoulder was safe, the only thing left that she could hold onto in a non-reality of not being up so high in the air.

"If you open your eyes you'll see it's not that bad," Hiccup told her. His voice was lower than usual, and she felt a little laugh rumble in his stomach as she held him, it made her shiver and she momentarily opened her eyes. His freckled neck was to her left, warm and comfortable, and to her right was the open sky. Clouds below and above her, the winds were unfamiliar to and she buried her face back.

She felt Hiccup's shoulder nudge up into her nose, pushing her head up.

"Come on, Alastair." Hiccup grunted a bit. "Where's that warrior spirit?"

"B-back on the ground." She quivered.

"Hey now!" Hiccup let out a forgiving sigh. "Just look, it'll be alright." She felt his hand lightly pat hers on his stomach. "What's the point of coming up here if you're not going to see the view?"

Astrid let out a sigh. He was right, and while the idea sounded noble and timely once she was up there it just seemed like her dumbest idea to date. Still she leaned back and fully opened her eyes.

The view was horrifying. But she couldn't look away.

"Everything looks so!" She wouldn't stop looking down no matter how much it scared her. She and Hiccup were friendsâ€|she had to get used to this.

"Insignificantâ€|?" Hiccup finished for her. "Almost like you understand why dragons feel the need to just kill us, they feel superior, and who couldn't when you can flyâ€|?"

"Hiccupâ€|.?" Astrid blinked, never hearing him speak like that. "Why didn't you just fly off? When you and Toothless learned to fly. Why didn't you just fly away? You can't tell me you haven't at least thought about it."

She felt the muscles in his stomach tighten, and she gripped him tighter, hoping he wouldn't notice just how tightly she was holding onto him. She placed her nose on his shoulder, enjoying the closeness for what it was worth.

"Of course I've thought about it." He looked down at Toothless and the two shared a glance, communicating. "We both have." He sighed. "There's just too much left to try before we can give up and run awayâ€|. Alastair, I didn't tell you what happened when I went to visit my mother's memorial. But my grandfather, he's the spiritual elder in the villageâ€|he watches over the entire family. He knows about us, about the dragons and Toothless."

"What!?" She knew her stomach tightened as well, and it felt even worse since her inside felt like they were floating within her as they flew. "Hiccup howâ€"?"

"He thinks I should just leave tooâ€|" Hiccup cut her off. "He said to take Toothlessâ€|and some girl with me."

Astrid's heart joined her stomach.

"Aâ€|a girlâ€|?" He knewâ€|he knew didn't heâ€|.? She loosened her grip, almost tipping backwards too far in her daze.

"Yeahâ€|I don't know what he means by that, I guess there's someone else here who knows about all this. I'm betting it's Arte. She's always so calculatingâ€|"

Astrid released a shaky breath.

Why was he so stupid? She didn't know if she was sad or relieved that he still didn't get it. On one hand if he knew she could just deal with it now and get it over withâ€|but if he didn'tâ€"her hands tightened around him again, his scent wafting in her eyes due to the windâ€"she could stay like thisâ€|.

"If I do leave, I'm not taking a girl with meâ€|I'm taking youâ€|" He said. "You're much more important to me than any woman."

She swallowed, burying her face in his shoulder without thinking, her arms practically squeezing him.

"Butâ€|" Hiccup breathed. "We have this one chance to try things out. If we can defeat the dragon army when they do comeâ€|then we might be able to change the people's minds. Old Wrinkly doesn't seem to think so, but I have to try first before I give up and run awayâ€|I'm still the princeâ€|these are still my people."

"Did you tell your fatherâ€|.?" Astrid asked, her words muffled by his shirt over her lips.

"Noâ€|I couldn't, everything was too complicated."

Astrid only nodded. "But then how are you going to defeat the army?"

You can't possibly think you're going to do it by yourself."

"I'll have Toothless and you and I can read the dragon's minds; that's gotta be useful for something."

"Hiccup, don't be stupid, you need other military support. I haven't even been properly trained in dragon fighting techniques yet."

"But what if my father locks me up? What if I'll become nothing but a weapon to him? Or what if he doesn't even listen and has me sent off to Rome like he had originally planned? My father's finally proud of me, but it's not for the right reasons; he thinks I'll be a good King by upholding the family tradition, but I want to change everything. I can't risk this!"

Astrid bit her lip, not knowing how to respond. She wanted to have all the answers, to tell him something that would make him feel confident or just slap some sense into him, but she couldn't think of anything. It frustrated her. She had never really had to comfort anyone before, and now the one time she almost ached to; she couldn't.

She opened a hand that rested on his stomach, reaching forward and grabbing his hand on the reigns.

"Whatever you do, I'm beside you until the end, my prince!" she told him.

She didn't need to see his face to know he was smiling.

"You're a strange guy, Alastair, you know that? .? "

"I could say the same for you!"

He hushed her then, pointing forward to the sky. The clouds were practically dancing in the blue sky. The late noon sun was above them. It was beautiful to see the clouds stacked on each other as they flew into them, the wetness was left all over Astrid's clothing but it felt refreshing.

"Wow!" she breathed.

"I know!" Hiccup said with a grin. "Thank you, Alastair; for letting me show this to you."

"And thank you; for sharing it! ."

0o0

The flight was long and peaceful. Toothless needed to stretch his wings and while Astrid knew the both of them usually tried more exciting aerial techniques they were keeping things light because she was riding.

She would've commented on it, perhaps apologized for slowing them down, but she was too lost in the calmness of it all. She could've fallen asleep right on Hiccup's shoulder, but the jolt and floating within her always reminded her that no matter how comfortable she was she was still flying above the clouds, and falling would certainly kill her.

And then who would protect Hiccup?

The closer they got to the impending dragon attack the more she was facing the reality of the friendship she had cultivated. Hiccup was a special boy, he possessed an ability that would make him either an enemy or a sought out weapon for the rest of his life. But he was peaceful by nature yet reckless, a combination that could only lead to him doing stupid things for noble reasons.

He needed someone to protect him. He needed her. And she would have to be prepared to stand by his side through it all. She swallowed, never expecting such a weighty task upon donning boy's clothing and joining the King's Warriors. But it wasn't even about that anymore; it wasn't about being a soldier or even killing every dragon she could to avenge her brother. It was about protecting Hiccup so he could change the world.

She shifted her hands, making sure the sweat on her palms didn't stain his shirt too much, and she felt him move beneath her fingers. It felt so foreign!

"You must be really scared, you haven't let go of me the whole time." Hiccup let out a weak laugh.

"S-sorry I can't" She began to back away, but the wind was strong, so she clung again.

"It's fine, I'd rather be in an awkward position than have you fall off. But, I can make a harness suit for you, so you can ride without falling off, if you want."

She perked up.

"That would be good then you two can still practice flight maneuvers even if I happen to be tagging along." She could practically hurl at the thought of all the tricks they did, but that was something she'd have to get used to as well. If Hiccup could handle it so could she.

"Great, we can get started on it when we get back!" Hiccup trialed, his view focusing dead ahead.

Astrid had been so preoccupied with just resting on Hiccup she hadn't noticed the grey plumes that rolled past them. The entire sky was getting darker.

"What happened?" She asked. "The sky was clear just a minute ago."

She heard the leather bunch under his grasp as Hiccup tightened his grip on the reigns.

"There might be a storm; we need to land." Hiccup said, his voice as tight as his grip. Astrid tightened her grasp on him as well. Sliding forward and sitting more upright. She could already make the assumption that being all slouched over Hiccup wasn't a good idea if they actually had to fly somewhere with some speed. Her chest was pressed against his back, and she gulped, hoping that her bindings weren't going to loosen.

The calm in the gull of the clouds got to be too eerie. Toothless let out a grumble, turning sharply as if he had heard something. Astrid kept her eyes open, scanning the grey around them for any sudden movements. She was beginning to get the feeling they weren't alone.

If a Viking ship was nearby and spotted a nigh fury flying they'd be done for! shooting Toothless down and then discovering the prince and his protector were riding it!

But Astrid was actually saddened to find out that a Viking ship was the furthest from their worries when claws nipped at her back. She jutted forward, squeezing hard into Hiccup. She could feel a few scars across her back, but nothing blood-letting. The wind was knocked out of her, though.

"What was that?" She asked with a gasp, regaining her composure just enough before Toothless made a sharp dive. She wrapped her arms around Hiccup's torso instinctively as they dipped.

"Hiccup, what's going on?" She asked again, but Hiccup turned his head a bit towards her, hissing a shush.

"Stay quiet," he whispered hoarsely. "Toothless says we're being surrounded by members of his nest! if we get down they'll think he's captured us and won't attack!"

What he said was a mouthful! but Astrid took his lead and leaned down on him as he pressed his chest to the saddle. Out of the grey came figures! wings! tails. She swallowed roughly and buried her face into the back of Hiccup's shirt. She knew they were being surrounded. That the dragons were probably sniffing them out, but as long as she had her eyes screwed shut and face buried in Hiccup's back she could manage it.

"Where's Toothless taking us?!" She whispered, so faintly, and so muffled into Hiccup back that she was surprised when he responded.

"To the dragon's nest!" Hiccup said simply. There was no emotion in his voice. Or perhaps there were too many that it just canceled everything out.

Either way she had taken her first flight and already she was about to see what no other Viking had before: the enemy's territory.

0o0

Hiccup had almost forgotten what it was like to be surrounded by foreign voices. He was used to Toothless's mind echoing through him, but they were surrounded by dragons, and the voices were all jumbling together. His head ached as he tried to locate Toothless's channel! seeking out a familiar voice in a muck of groans.

Try not to move around too much. He heard Toothless speak.
We can pull this off if you and the girl stay still.

We're trying, Hiccup groaned.

_:::Mother is not happyâ€|you have been away too long this time.:::
_One of the dragons pestered Toothless.

:::I can smell the human on you::: a zippleback hissed. _:::Your body
smells like humans.:::_

_:::And your's smells like ten day old boar.::: _Toothless snipped.
_:::And I've been gone before, why is this time any
different?:::_

:::You know the plansâ€|:::

_:::I'm not needed for anything yet, so why do I have to stick
around?::: _Hiccup raised a brow at Toothless's response. Needed, for
what?

:::You are needed for the raid.:::

Toothless turned his nose, not wanting to be bothered. Hiccup's hands
tightened on the reigns, feeling Alastair shake from above him. He
felt awful for putting Alastair through this on his first flight, but
it wasn't something that could be helped at the moment. The boy's
hands encircled his stomach and kept hugging tighter. Hiccup had a
hand wedged under his stomach and grabbed Alastair's, holding it. It
was one of the few times he could say he was protecting Alastair for
once.

A Zippleback curled around Toothless's tail, sniffing at
it.

_:::Humansâ€|::: _It hissed again. _:::Why is there are a human
contraption on you?:::_

Hiccup could tell Toothless was caught off guard, he didn't know how
to explain the tail. There was no way he could and keep his
half-baked excuse up of capturing the humans on his back instead of
actually needing them to fly.

_:::Toothlessâ€|::: _Hiccup said, chewing his lip. They wouldn't be
able to maneuver too well if Hiccup had to be hunched over, and
Toothless knew that. They were both deep in thought, trying to cancel
out the jeers and jabs of the dragons surrounding them. They all
chastised Toothless, sure, but Hiccup felt one very clear emotion
from the words: jealousy.

_:::Let's get out of here.::: _Toothless said. But his thoughts were
unsure.

_:::Are you sure that's a good ideaâ€|?::: _Hiccup asked
anyways.

_:::Noâ€|but it'll be worse if we go in there. I won't be able to
guarantee your safety.::: _

Hiccup chewed his lip and squeezed Alastair's hand. Things might've
been different if it was just him and Toothless, but neither of them
were willing to risk Alastair's safety.

:::Alrightâ€|let's goâ€|::: Hiccup nodded. He pulled at Alastair's

hand slightly.

"Hold on tight, okay?" He told him, and he felt the boy nod into his shirt.

Hiccup moved his foot slightly into position four, rearing up.

_::The human is alive!:: _The dragons called. Hiccup could feel Toothless's worry as they all flew after them. At least fifteen dragons at their backs, all nipping while he heard Alastair's shrieks.

_::Faster Toothless!:: _Hiccup yelled, though he knew Toothless was already going extremely fast. The dragons were trailing slowly behind them, but by their words he knew they weren't going to stop.

Suddenly, a monstrous nightmare appeared right in front of them, having taken a shortcut to cut them off, and shot at Toothless. The heat of the fire was torturous almost, but Hiccup kept his composure best he could, he didn't want Alastair to get burned.

Alastair's arms were tight on him still as Toothless and the nightmare seemed to continue in what seemed to be a shot battle. The nightmare could never get close enough to Toothless to strike, but by that time the other dragons were now at their tails again.

He heard Alastair give out a scream, and his arms were pulled off of him.

"Hiccup!" Alastair cried before trying to fend off the dragon that took him by the tunic and pulled him away. He had forgotten his axeâ€|

"Alastair! Dammitâ€|no!" He tried to turn Toothless away and after Alastair but at that point they were completely surrounded. Dragons nipped at Toothless's legs, his wingsâ€|his prosthetic tail and in a spiral of teeth, claws, sea stacks and water Hiccup's vision went black.

0o0

Hiccup woke up wet. And his first thought was that he was drowning, but when he opened his mouth, the breaths came inâ€"painfullyâ€"but in. It was then he realized the wetness on his skin was sweat. He was bathed in it yet trapped in somewhere extremely warm. Was he burning?

His senses turned on suddenly, a jolt of sensations going over his skin. His knees were pressed to the ground and were too hot, his hands pressed to the ground were too hot. He yelped but found that everywhere he placed his body was met with the same results.

He managed instead.

Nextâ€|Toothlessâ€|Alastairâ€|where were they?

"Tooth-!" he began to cry only to see that Alastair was sprawled out across from him. For whatever reason they were in a cavern encased in

rock, and it felt like they were being baked alive. But Alastair was there, that was priority one at the moment.

"Alastair, Alastair!" Hiccup ran over to him, only wincing slightly as his knees touched the ground that time. The boy was out cold and he shook him heavily. "Come on Alastair you gotta wake up. Alastair!"

No answer.

"Alastair!" he called again, not know what else to do. He pressed a hand to his lipsâ€|he was still breathing rather normally, thank Thor. Jostling him up Hiccup placed a hand on Alastair's sweaty back and lifted him on his own shoulder. His tunic was ripped from the dragon clawing at him, but as far he could feel there was only sweatâ€|no blood. Hiccup knew he wasn't strong enough to carry Alastairâ€|but he could take him along while he explored where they were.

Even the thick souls of his boots felt like they were sticking to his feet as he walked. The heat penetrated everything, and it didn't help that he was dragging Alastair's weight along with him as well.

He kept walking through the cave. One side only seemed to get hotter and hotter, so Hiccup went the opposite way.

"Toothless!" He called. If he had found Alastair, Toothless couldn't be that far away, right? "Toothless! Where are you!?" Hiccup spotted another dead end, but as he neared it his range of hearing voices grewâ€|at least he was near an entranceâ€|even if he couldn't get to it that way.

There was a small puncture in the wall of rocks, a hole to the outside. He peeped through it, seeing the dragon's nest in it's entirety. He gasped. It was nothing but a volcano. Pillars of rock and dragons sitting atop all of them. At the pit was fire, and out of it came a great figure the likes of which Hiccup didn't think was possible.

It was a colossal dragon, armored and spiked beyond belief. He gulped, that dragon must've been the mother that all the others spoke of so often. But she looked more like a demon than a mother.

He kept Alastair at his side, but kept his mind open to listen. He saw Toothless at the center, standing reserved as the colossal dragon looked him dead in the eye. It gave Hiccup chills, but Toothless seemed unfazed.

_:::Yes mother?::: _Toothless asked.

:::Don't play dumb with me, you know very well what I'm angry about.:::

Hiccup listened to the colossal dragon's speech. It was much more sentence literate than the othersâ€| just like Toothless.

:::I wasn't gone for as long as the last time. I just had some minor setbacks.:::

The colossal dragon rose forward a bit more, getting closer to

Toothless and eyeing his tail. Her nostrils flailed, angry.

:::You've gone and gotten yourself hurt.:::

:::Other dragons return hurt all the time. I had a bad run in with a human is all.:::

_:::Coming back hurt is other thing, but coming back with a human contraption strapped to you as well as humans on your backâ€|:: _she snorted. _:::unforgivable._:::

_:::So just disown me alreadyâ€|::: _Toothless shot back, though there was no factual weight behind his words, Hiccup sense. It was almost as if Toothless were teasing the colossal dragon. Sassing her.

:::You know I cannot.::: _the colossal dragon replied.

:::Well then, in the end I can do whatever I want, isn't that correct, mother?:::

_That _didn't sit well with her. She roared loudly, shaking the whole volcano. Hiccup covered his ears as best he could with Alastair in his arms, but the sound still shook his brain beyond comfort.

:::I am the one responsible for your birth! You will not address me in such a way.:::

:::If you said so out of some kind of affection, perhaps I would.::: _Toothless still tried her. _:::But I was nothing but a deal between you and fatherâ€|:::

_:::Just remember where your loyalties lie. You were created for one reason onlyâ€|don't go back on it or else you know the consequencesâ€|:::

_:::I'm not of much use nowâ€|::: _Toothless said. _:::I can't fly on my own, that ability is gone at the hands of a humanâ€|:::

Another colossal roar. It hurt just a little less the first time.

:::How could you have let this happen?::: _She bit.

_:::I'll find a way to get aroundâ€|:::

:::That doesn't involve humans. You know the raid is coming quickly, any ties you've made are foolish for they'll all die.:::

Hiccup felt Toothless swallow back, there was a fear that was sparked at those words.

:::We all rest earlier nowâ€|resting up for the first wave of attacksâ€|. You will sleep here tonight.:::

:::And the humans I was carrying?::: _Toothless asked, desperately.

:::They will not be alive when you awaken.:::

Hiccup scrunched his face. So they were left in there to burn. He let out a breath, it was dry and his neck was sweating like mad. Nothing was worse than being slowly roasted to death in a sealed off and heated cavern of a volcano.

"Uhermmâ€|" he heard a moan and looked over at Alastair. He was moving. Relief washed over him instantly.

"Alastair, you're okay!?"

The boy nodded, slowly and tired, but his eyes were open, even if it was half-mast.

"What happened?" Alastair asked.

"We got captured by the dragonsâ€|they were just in there reading Toothless the riot act for being caught with us and getting injured. And that mother dragonâ€|she'sâ€|she's huge.__"

Alastair shot up, worried. "She's not going to kill him is she?"

Hiccup looked away for a moment, seeing the small hole in the rocks. He squinted.

"I don't think she could even if she wanted to."

"What?"

"Toothless seems to be really valuable to this nestâ€|.he was a deal or something between the mother and father."

"Well, we haven't heard another about his father yetâ€|just the mother and a Nidhogg you said was mentioned."

"Maybeâ€|" Hiccup jolted upright. His mind pained to think of the conclusion.

"Do you thinkâ€|" Alastair seemed to be within the same thoughts.

"That Toothless and Nidhogg are related?"

"We barely even know who Nidhogg is." Alastair added. "Though I feel like I've heard of that name from somewhereâ€|"

"We might be able to research it in the palace archives." Hiccup looked down. It made him shiver despite the overwhelming heat of the cavern that the raid was closeâ€|closer than ever now. He couldn't stall anymore, he had to start making a defense plan with Toothless.

But they had to get out first.

"So how are we going to get out of here?" Alastair asked.

"Iâ€|I don't know." He looked at Alastair. He looked fine enough from the front, but he had already felt the tears in the back of his tuni. He sighedâ€|another injury Alastair had received because of

him.

"I'm fine, Hiccupâ€|you don't have to look at me like that." Alastair assured him. "We just really need to get out of here." He pulled at his tunic. "Before we roast alive."

Hiccup could only agree, but there was no convenient way out, only two ways, one was closed off and the other was getting closer to the heat. Their best bet was to stay at the far end, but even after a while that wouldn't save them.

He was sweating so much, though, he could barely thinkâ€|so he began taking off his shirt.

"H-hey, what are you doing?" Alastair suddenly freaked out.

"I can't think in this heatâ€|and we both have on so many layers we'll die earlier than needed if we keep on all these clothes." He took off his tunic and his riding vest, but had to keep on his pants and bootsâ€|he couldn't risk burning his skin when he sat or walked.

He looked over at Alastair, who just sat there, red and closed off.

"You want to die from heat stroke?"

"I'm fine," the boy squeaked.

"Alastair, what's the matter?" He wasn't going to lose Alastair over something silly like not wanting to remove layers. He was always so secretiveâ€|

"I'll be fine, let's just figure out how to get out of here."

Hiccup chewed his cheek before shaking his headâ€|he couldn't go there nowâ€|

"Well without your axe I guess breaking the wall down is out. And even if we could do that the volcano has no floorâ€|we'd be trapped and I'm sure the dragons would swarm around in and pick us clean."

"That's a lovely imageâ€|" Alastair sighed, letting out a labored breath while he pulled at his tunic again. "What about Toothlessâ€|?"

"He's with the other dragonsâ€|and I'm not sure he can come find us."

"Well how strong is your link? Maybe you can talk even when he's far away?" Alastair suggested and Hiccup perked upâ€|he had never thought of that.

He crawled over to the wall of the cavern again, placing a hand to the hot rocks. His breaths were labored and his vision was dizzy but he continued to try and use what was left of his willpower to find Toothless's channel.

He was overwhelmed with dragon dreams, which he would've found the

elaborate artistry of them more appealing if he wasn't on a specific mission.

_:::Toothlessâ€|Toothless can you hear meâ€|? Toothless!?:_None of the other dragons respondedâ€|probably because none of them were used to answering to a nameâ€|

_:::Are you alright??:_He finally got a signal, but it was weak. Toothless must've been far on the other side.

:::They locked us in a cavernâ€|it's very hot in here, I don't know how much longer Alastair and I can make it.:::

There was a long pause in between answers, and Hiccup feared he had lost the connection until he finally got another weak response.

:::I'm coming for youâ€|:::

:::Don't get hurt, Toothlessâ€|:::

_:::I'll be alright, just stay away from the walls.:::_Toothless warned before the connection faded again. Hiccup let out a breath and slid further down.

His mind was dimming, and his muscles felt too relaxed yet too stiff all at the same time. He looked over at Alastairâ€|he was laying on the ground again, panting.

Hiccup slowly crawled over to the boy, remembering Toothless orders to stay away from the walls.

"Alastairâ€|" he breathed, though it was a weak whisper at best. "I told youâ€|you needed toâ€|"

"I'm fineâ€|" Alastair squeaked weakly.

"No you're not you dummyâ€|just take something off and you'llâ€|you'llâ€|." Hiccup's eye lids felt heavy, his mind still worked but his body was too heated. His breaths muzzled into Alastair's stomach as he collapsed there.

Hiccup's mind still reeled even after he was sure he had lost physical consciousness. A dream wasn't rare for him, but never had he had one that felt so real. He was walking on waterâ€|the view was beautiful enough to captivate him but at the edge of the break was a large treeâ€|it's leaves were so many colors it almost looked like a flower itselfâ€|

A girl was at the base of it, blonde hair flowing in the gentle sea breeze.

"Do you still love meâ€|?" The girl said her words echoed over the ocean and his mind.

"What?" Hiccup raised a brow. "Love you? I don't even know youâ€|"

Suddenly a loud crash bombed in his ears, and he looked as the water around his legs began to turn red. Blood red. He screamed and ran

towards the girl, but the blood followed him. The girl's chest began to glow.

Another crash, and he turned behind him to see a large serpent raise forth from the water. It gave a haunting shrill and Hiccup covered his ears.

"What's going on?" He asked the girl, her chest still glowing.

She didn't answer, she simply tugged at light on her chest, pulling a glowing weapon from it, though Hiccup couldn't tell what the weapon was. It was so big, he wondered how she could lift it.

"Get behind me," she told him, and the serpent leaped towards her.

Hiccup let out a yelp as the battle raged before him, and blood still pooled around him.

"Let me help you!" Hiccup cried out to the girl, she didn't look like she could win, even with such a big weapon.

"Wake up!" She called back to him.

"What?"

"Wake up!"

Hiccup snapped up, his world back to normal. Or at least back to where he knew he had passed out.

Toothless nudged urgently at his leg.

_:::Wake up, please wake up!:::_Toothless urged him.

"Toothless?" Hiccup smiled and reached forward, the night fury licked his hand, but that was all the affection he could offer. Hiccup looked over Toothless. The wall of the cavern was smashed in, and dragons were swarming near them as he looked.

He sprang up on wobbly legs and mounted on Toothless before he looked over and saw that Alastair was still out cold again.

Hiccup sighed.

_:::I've got her,::_Toothless flapped and picked Alastair up with his front legs, flying down the other end.

_:::Toothless you're going the wrong way!:::_Hiccup yelled.

_:::Just trust me, it'll get a bit hot, though, so hold on._Toothless told him, and Hiccup could already feel the familiar heat.

In his haste he realized he had left his riding vest and tunic back in the cavern so he really did have to hold on this time. He clutched the reigns of Toothless's saddle as they reached an opening, but it only lead to a boiling pit of magma.

The heat was more than Hiccup could bear he felt his skin tearing,

his hair sparking.

_::Hold on humanâ€|::_Toothless told him gently, flying upwards and away from the pit. He shot a blast against the side of the wall, breaking a small hole that he flew out of.

The second they were free and the fresh air filled Hiccup's nostrils tears came out of his eyes.

He _never w_ant to experience almost burning to death ever againâ€|

The joy was short lived, though, for at their tails was still a herd of dragons.

_::We have to fight them off here,:::_Toothless said. _::Or else we're never going to get away.:::_

_::Do whatever you have to.:::_Hiccup told him, too nervous about falling off, or of Toothless losing his grip on Alastair to worry about anything else.

::Alright, then catch her.:::

_::Catch herâ€|?:::_Hiccup asked in confusion before Toothless flung Alastair up in the air. Hiccup's eyes widened and he opened his arms, catching him just under his armpits and pulled him up to sit in front. His back was scratched, his body damp from sweat, and his face was still so red even after being outside. But Hiccup clung to the boy, not wanting either of them to fall off.

_::Hold on and keep close.:::_Toothless told him before they both jetted back into the action. Toothless let out a battle cry before shooting forth blasts at the dragons, it hit one or two but the other swiftly dodged and continued in pursuit. Toothless kept his stance, though, and when Hiccup saw the jaw of the monstrous nightmare open and lock onto Toothless's claws he closed his eyes. All he saw every time he opened them were teeth gnawing on skin. He knew dragon skin was tougher than human skin, but he could feel the grunts and spikes of pain Toothless let out. He would've had much less but he made sure every bite that would've gone to Hiccup or Alastair was taken by him.

This wasn't workingâ€|.

Hiccup clutched his hold onto Alastair but looked all around. There had to be a quicker solution to this without Toothless taking all the damage. A gronckle's tail soon whacked them, thoughâ€|and sent all them crashing down into the water. Hiccup's hands were taut has he held onto the reigns and Alastair while they fell backwards. The cold water did wonders for his burning skin, but nothing for his worries.

_::Toothless we need another plan!:::_Hiccup said.

::I can see that.:::

::We can just swim awayâ€|they won't come in after us.:::

_::The blood in the water will attract sea creaturesâ€|and they'll

just follow us back to the island.:::

Hiccup frowned. What elseâ€|he looked up, the sea stacks around them pillared even higher now that they were in the water. And the dragons circles them in the sky, waiting for the second they came from the water.

_:::Toothlessâ€| .:::

_:::Yes?:::

_:::What if we fly up? We can take them all down with one blow.:::

_:::My shots cannot take them all outâ€|it would have to hit something first.:::

_:::We'll use the sea stacks, we just have to get them all near a really tall oneâ€|:::

Toothless stayed in the thought a bit before agreeing.

_:::We can tryâ€|::: _He kicked his tail up and flapped his wings, Hiccup switching positions as best he could to get them out of the water.

The dragons dove after them as expected.

_:::You're not going to betray mother anymore!::: _They roared.

One blast moved them out of the way, and still up into the clouds they ascended. Hiccup scanned below them for the perfect spot.

_:::There!::: _He turned Toothless's attention towards a rather tall seas stack, it looked almost impossible that it stood on it's own. One well-coordinated shot would bring it down and the other stacks around it.

He switched positions again, turning them to hover just below the clouds, the dragons weren't as fast as Toothless, but were quickly bearing on them.

_:::Pull Toothlessâ€| .::: _Hiccup saidâ€|they had to time it just rightâ€|

_:::Why are you just floating thereâ€|?::: _One of the dragons jested.

_:::Come and face us like a-:::

_:::NOW!::: _Hiccup called out and Toothless shot, a sense of satisfaction being released as the blast hit the first sea stack and tumbled over the others. Large chunks of rock fell among the dragons and toppled them down into the water one by one.

All but one monstrous nightmare.

_:::Of course he makes it...::: _Toothless glared.

_:::Why do you feel so above us?::: _The nightmare asked instead of attacking.

:::I don't feel superiorâ€| I just think differently.:::

:::You fly with these humans, betraying motherâ€|:::

_:::I didn't ask for this pathâ€|it choose me.::: _Toothless looked away.

:::Your path was already chosenâ€|.you're offspring of Nidhogg. And mother loves you moreâ€|:::

_:::I've had enough of thisâ€|::: _Toothless turned to fly away, but the nightmare fired a shot at his back, they dodged it swiftly, but Toothless turned back, with a growl.

_:::Just you waitâ€|::: _the nightmare warned. _:::Soon all that will be left of your humans is blood.:::_

Hiccup swallowed, clutching Alastair and the reigns yet again.

_:::Is he leaving usâ€|?::: _Hiccup asked, as the nightmare turned and flew off, not attacking anymore.

_:::He's not stupid, he wouldn't go up against me aloneâ€|::: _Toothless said.

Hiccup let out a labored breath as he looked down at the dragons, they were all helping themselves out of the water, spitting out water and only firing out smoke. They had pulled it off, but it was difficult, battling like that.

_:::Let's go homeâ€|:::_Hiccup sighed, looking down at Alastair.

_:::Yesâ€| :::_Toothless agreed. _:::Homeâ€|:::_

0o0

When they finally returned to the cove the night was late. Hiccup winced at how much of a lecture he'd get for being out so late, and without his tunics to boot.

He gently placed Alastair on the ground as he dismounted and took Toothless's saddle off.

_:::Are you alright?::: _Hiccup asked as Toothless began licking his wounds.

:::Believe me, I've had worseâ€|:::

_:::Okayâ€|::: _Hiccup let out a breath, wanting to just drop all the burning questions he had from the day's event, but while he had Toothless in a calm situation he just asked promptly. _:::Alright, well then, what was all that about?:::_

_:::It wasn't obvious?:::_Toothless asked.

_:::Toothless don't get like that with me. I heard that conversation

between you and your mother. What are you? What's this deal between your mother and Nidhogg? And what were you created for or needed for?:::_

He felt Toothless lock his thoughts again

:::Argh! Don't do that, why can't you just tell me!?:::

_:::There's just some things you don't need to know right nowâ€|:::_Toothless turned his nose away, his words cold and controlled.

:::Toothlessâ€|:::

_:::But,:::_Toothless cut him off. _:::After what happened I can expect the raid to be here any day nowâ€|we need to prepare for the task at hand.:::_

:::So we'll trainâ€|we did a decent job fighting off the dragons tonight.:::

:::I fear that the ones we battled tonight were only a small portion of what will be unleashed here.:::

_:::So you don't think we'll be able to do it ourselvesâ€|?:::_Hiccup gulped. He'd do _anything_to avoid telling his fatherâ€|

_:::This is stretching my loyalties, but if you can your military's helpâ€|you might winâ€|:::_Toothless said and Hiccup groaned.

:::And what are your loyalties, Toothlessâ€|? I thought we both wanted to end this war?:::

:::It's very complicated for me, humanâ€|you simply don't understandâ€|:::

_:::Maybe I would if you'd talk to me about it. Why are you so closed off all the time-?:::_Hiccup reached forward but Toothless pulled away, not wanting the closeness at the moment.

Hiccup felt as if he should've been angry, but instead he just felt exhausted. What Old Wrinkly had told him, all the mysterious information about Toothless, being captured, the strange dream he hadâ€|..He just want to bathe, fall into bed and just forget the raid, telling his father, Toothless's secrets, the fact that he'd have to make a new riding vest for himselfâ€|everything.

_:::Get some rest and come back tomorrowâ€|we can talk more then.:::_Toothless told him, and gently nuzzled his nose into Hiccup's hand. Hiccup grinned softly, and scratched below his chin before looking over at Alastair. He was still out.

"Manâ€|" Hiccup sighed. What a mess of a day.

0o0

Hiccup sat leaning against Toothless and resting a bit while he waited for Alastair to wake up. There was no way he could carry Alastair back to the palace for more reasons than not just being able to physically.

Carrying a wounded warrior, shirtless, and past midnight would raise too many eyebrows. His own body still hurt from the fight but he could manage.

He looked over at Alastair, looking more like he was in a light sleep than passed out. Still, Hiccup couldn't fathom why he'd intentionally let himself die just because he didn't want to remove his tunic. He reached forward and moved some hair out of Alastair's eyes, even when they were closed, they looked worriedâ€|

"You're so dumbâ€|" Hiccup whispered and leaned back against Toothless's warmth.

"Hiccupâ€|" Alastair mumbled, and Hiccup stirred, grabbing his shoulders and shaking the warrior for all it was worth. That seemed to wake him up. "Hey stop it," he swatted Hiccup away.

"Alastair you're such an idiot, you could've died, why didn't you justâ€?"

"Stop yelling," Alastair clutched his head. "Pleaseâ€|it's making my ears ring."

"Let's just get back to palace," Hiccup bit back any other words, suddenly feeling like the mother rather than Alastair for a change. Maybe Toothless would start calling him_a girl as well? "It's already late enough," he added.

:::Goodnight Toothlessâ€|stay in the shadows, okay?::

_:::I willâ€|:_Toothless woke slightly from his doze. _:::As you should as well.::_

Hiccup could only nod, looking up at the sky. It was clear, the stars shown brightly in a cloudless void, but he gulpedâ€|imagining each of those stars as a dragon, charging right for the central palace of Berk.

0o0

Hiccup kept an arm around Alastair as they walked home, not being able to stand seeing the boy walk so gingerly after a tough climb out of the cove.

"How many injuries is this now because of me?" Hiccup frowned.

"Who's counting?"

"I amâ€|"

"Hiccup focus on what needs to be focused on. You and I both know after tonight the raid is sure to come any day nowâ€| ."

Hiccup could almost laugh at how Alastair and Toothless matched fears if the situation wasn't so serious.

"I already told both of youâ€|we can take themâ€|.even if Toothless doesn't think so."

"Well, whatever Toothless said I'd say trust him." Alastair said.
"Those dragons are his familyâ€|he knows what they're capable of."

"Those dragons aren't Toothless's familyâ€|" Hiccup said softly. "He came back with_ us. We're _his family."

Alastair sighed but Hiccup was seriousâ€|Toothless wanted to end the war just like he did and just like Alastair did. Willpower had to count for something.

"So you just want to charge into the wind against an army of angry and calculating dragons and do whatâ€|fight them offâ€|how are you going to accomplish that without killing them?"

"Toothless and I fought off the dragons together while you were passed outâ€|we can do it."

"I guarantee you the ones you faced are half the number that's coming here."

Hiccup bit his lipâ€|

"Or whatâ€|if you loose you'll just take Toothless and I and split like your grandfather told youâ€|.?" He laughed a bit. "Hiccup just tell your father, be smart about this or just leave...pick one.."

"I told you I'm staying to defend Berk, only if I fail them then I'll leaveâ€|that's my plan. And you said you'd back me up."

"I willâ€|I just wish I had a bit more confidence in what I was backing upâ€|"

They were silent the rest of time. Hiccup could see the gears in Alastair's head turning, he was thinking about something, and for the millionth time he wished he could've figured out what.

They finally arrived back at the palace it was two hours past midnight, and Stoick was waiting right at the back entrance. Arms crossed, beard furrowed, and brows wrinkled.

"You two are _still _pulling these disappearing acts?" Stoick yelled.
"And after such exemplary actions beforeâ€|?"

Stoick took a better look at the two.

"And what in the name of Odin happened to you twoâ€|? Alastair your clothes are shredded and Hiccup you don't even shirt for Thor's sake."

Hiccup raised his shoulders, wincing at Stoick's words. He hadn't thought of a proper story to explain how odd things looked, and he didn't trust Alastair's skills to come up anything either. The warrior was good at keeping secrets, but not good at making up storiesâ€|

"We're sorry sir," Alastair said. "But we discovered something that might interest you."

"Well you'd better have found the location of the dragon's nest for as awful as you two look." Stoick said, a joke in his harshness. Hiccup's eyes widened. Noâ€|Alastair wasn't about toâ€|.

"We did sirâ€|we did just that." Alastair said and Hiccup could've punched him.

Traitor.

Man, these chapters are just so full ofâ€|stuffâ€|good stuffâ€|plot advancement stuff. Tis gonna get good from here everyone!

Review Responses:

Rose: Wish I could answer that or even hint at it. But the reveal is probably gonna be one of the biggest surprises in the story, soâ€|no spoilers XD

**StorSpeaker: You'll have to wait and see what Snotlout's up to. And Old Wrinkly is a spiritual expert, he kind of watches over his family by making deals with spirits. That'll be explained a lot better later in the story, as will the prophecy and all the red death stuff.
**

Ferdoos: Glad you like the chapter, hoped you liked this one. I know I did XD

92fireDemon: Thank you!

PrayerGirl: This chapter had a lot of fast paced plot stuffâ€|and some more character development as well. The chapters are only getting better from here!

**SAmaster01: Well, I don't know if Hiccup's battle has been completely replaceâ€|more like "moved", or "adjusted". And, no, it's not a romance storyâ€|though that doesn't mean there can't be romance in it. It's mostly focusing on character relationships, be they romantic, familial, or friendship. I mostly put that so no one was expecting tons of romance every chapter, cause that's simply not how it's going to go XD. But, in essence, this is a coming of age story, and it's about a prophecyâ€|which will be revealed overtime. Hiccup, Astrid, and Toothless will go through a complete journey to find out who they are, and why their status of role in society doesn't dictate who they can become and who they will become. The three go through a lot in the storyâ€|.which I'm guessing will be the length of my other big story (in the avatar fandom) which is about 70 chapters long. I'll be working on this story for a few years, but I love it so I'm excited to keep going at it! This is only part one, and while part one is almost finished there's still about 5-6 more parts left in the story. **

AliceCullen3: Thanks!

Daughter of sea and wisdom: Wish I could say, just stay tuned to find out when the "big reveal" happens.

**Teen Nightfury: Whew, I'm glad you didn't see it coming, that means I'm doing my job by surprising people XD And, hmmmm, I guess it is kind of like Finding Nemo. And it was an awkward flight, but so much other stuff was going onâ€|no romance though, at least not on

Hiccup's end XD.**

Anon: Wow thanks! I'm glad the character developmental stuff is coming through. And, yes, Astrid's made it over her first major character hurtle (first of many). And yeah, Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid are becoming a tighter unit. Toothless is starting to worry and defend both Hiccup **_and **_**Alastair.**

Rider of doom: Awww, thank you!

**Guest: Yeah, Hiccup's got a lot on his plateâ€|and maybe he's in a bit of denialâ€|hmmmmâ€|. But, yeah, no romantic flight confessionâ€|but plenty of plot. And I'm glad you like the quicker updates. I like them as well, even if it's a bit more work every week. **

Lord Anubis judge of the dead: Haha, thank you! That's **_exactly **_**what I was going for!**

Thanks for all the reviews people! As I keep saying, stuff only gets better from here!

Next chapter: Archived and Prepared

12. Archived and Prepared

So this is more or less a prelude chapterâ€|so it's a bit shorter (if 7000 words is shortâ€|) but after this there's only two chapters left until Part 1 of the story is complete (not the entire story itselfâ€| just part 1 of it).

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Twelve: Archived and Prepared

Stoick took them immediately to the throne room, telling the guards to not let anyone in until the three were done talking.

Astrid could see Hiccup was not pleased as they walked. His skin glowed in an angry red, and she was only made more aware of it by the fact that he was shirtless.

Normally at a time like that she'd place a hand on his shoulder and tell him everything would be alright. But she was the problem this timeâ€|

"Now, tell me exactly what you're talking about." Stoick said, taking a seat on the throne.

"Hiccup and I have beenâ€|" Astrid paused for a moment. The story was hardly half-baked. She had been thinking about it the whole walk back. But seeing the king sitting at the throne with his arms crossed paying intent attention to herâ€|knowing that she was about to change the fate of the Vikings forever by simply uttering one secret. "We've been actively looking for leads of the location of the dragon's nest for weeks nowâ€|that's why we've been sneaking out. Hiccup's very determined to find it and prove his worthiness to you."

She knew she's get yelled at by Hiccup for thisâ€|but she had her

reasonsâ€|

She didn't dare glance over at the prince, though. Not wanting to see his glare, or the look of betrayal on his face.

"We tookâ€|a boat this afternoon and were able to locate the island, the dragons seem to be mobilizing to attack usâ€|which would explain why the attacks have nearly stopped for the past few weeksâ€|" She sank to the ground, bowing. "I'm sorry we've been withholding such information, but we wanted to make sure our findings were true."

Astrid cut her eyes up, her chin still pressed to the ground. Stoick gave a tiny smile before looking at Hiccup. But she was still too scared to look at him.

"Hiccup, is this true?" Stoick asked.

"Yeâ€|yes Dadâ€|it's true. The dragons seem like they're coming here for a massive attackâ€|" He wouldn't say anymore.

Stoick let out a sigh, burying his face in his hand.

"We need to gather to warriorsâ€|" Stoick said. "Do you know if any other islands are in danger?"

"Not that I know ofâ€|" Hiccup said.

"Alright sonâ€|Alastair, good work. You two go bathe and relax before we speak again. You look like you've been through Hel and back."

Astrid stood. "We kind of have, sir." She leaned in a bow once more before turning to walk out. Hiccup was already half way out the door and she let out a groan. Quickening her stride to catch up with him.

0o0

He slammed the door right in her face once they got to their room. Not that it was very effective as he didn't lock it. She opened the door and slammed it herself once she entered.

"Look I know you're madâ€|" She started. How else would she start?

"Alastair you're a traitor!" He barked. "Didn't I _just _tell you while we were walking back that I _didn't _want the warrior's help? I'm trying to end this war not make it bloodier. And you s_aid _you'd be on my side, youâ€"!"

"I _am _on your side, Prince Hiccup!" She yelled, stopping him right there and grabbed his arm when he tried to walk away. _"But that means protecting youâ€|I still took an oath to your father." She looked him dead in the eye, feeling her own gaze burning him as much as his burned her.

"If you went along with your plan," she continued. "I might as well be serving you up on a marble dish to those dragons." The very thought made her want to yak. "What good will anything be if you're

dead? Those dragons aren't playing with us, Hiccup, they will _kill you. _I know you want to end things peacefullyâ€|I do tooâ€|I don't want any more warriors to die like my brother didâ€|but, that's just not an option right nowâ€| "

She let go of his arm. "You said while we were flying that you were still the princeâ€|and these were still your peopleâ€|so _be _that princeâ€|protect your home, don't let them all die because you think you can handle it on your own."

She could tell her words penetrated him. His frown went tighter, the corners of his lips sinking lower and lower. He was silent as he sat on his bed, finally looking up at her with softened eyes.

"You should have those injuries treated." He said lightly.

She turned her hand over her shoulder and touched her back. Her tunic was, indeed, ripped, her under-tunic tattered. While she didn't have any bloodâ€"it seemedâ€"the skin was rough and scabbed. Back injuries were definitely not something she wanted to have treatedâ€|that would require having the doctor wrap a bandage around her torso.

"It's not that bad, no blood." She shrugged it off, though her back was stiff. She just needed some hot water.

"Well, I know you probably want to bathe aloneâ€|so if you go now you should be able to, it's past midnight and no one's usually in there." Hiccup told her, his tone dry. She didn't know how to take it. Was he angry still at her telling Stoickâ€|? Or was he angry that she bathed alone?

"You're still angry with me?" She asked, not thinking.

"Why did you let yourself almost die back there, Alastairâ€|? In the cavern?" He asked, looking up at her, but she couldn't hold the eye contact. His eyes were searching hers, she could never handle thatâ€|

"There's justâ€|certain things you don't know about me." She told him, and he looked as if she'd punched him.

"Why? You and Toothless both say the same things." He grunted, seemingly talking to himself more than to her. "I thought we were all finally being honest with each other, I tell both of you everythingâ€|so why are there still so many secrets between all of us?"

"I'm sorryâ€|one day there won't beâ€|" She said softly, hoping he wouldn't hear her. He perked upâ€|he did.

She walked into her room, the conversation was too dangerous. But he followed her, oddly since he seldom went into her room.

"You said you want to protect meâ€|well _I _want to protect _you_. Don't leave me and Toothless alone by dying stupidly."

Had he really been that scared? She gulped, turning to face him. Those eyes of hisâ€|they drew her to do stupid things.

Like the garbage that came out of her mouth just then.

"It's my bodyâ€|" She started and Hiccup raised a brow. "It's a bit..deformed, I suppose."

"What?" Hiccup reared back. He wasn't expecting that, Astrid could tell. But she wasn't expecting to say that either.

She touched her chest, her body being defiant against her brain telling her to stop and shut up. The hole she was in was already deep with liesâ€|but they just kept piling up.

"Hereâ€|on my chestâ€|it was from a dragon attack when I was little. I'm just really self conscious about it."

Hiccup was silent for a moment, looking at her closely. His eyes squinted, like he didn't believe herâ€|or maybe he was just thinking? Either way it made her uneasy, she swallowed hard.

"Alrightâ€|" was all he said, going back to sit on his bed. "Tell me when you get back from the bath."

Astrid nodded and Hiccup sat up a bit, looking at her with a challenge in his eyes. But as she walked out he laid back down, crossing his arms behind his head and looking up at the ceiling.

0o0

It was only after about five hours of sleep that Astrid heard a knocking on her door. She went straight to bed after she returned from her bath, and Hiccup didn't speak a word to herâ€|not even a good night. She was so worried that he hadn't bought her story, and she would've slapped herself silly if she could for her dumb excuse.

It would stop him from thinking her need to be so private about her body was weird, but Hiccup wasn't stupidâ€|he didn't seem to be too happy the more excuses she made. Maybe he knew and was just waiting for her to tell himâ€|?

"Alastair!" She heard Hiccup call from outside the room. "Wake up, there's something we need to do!"

She quickly wrapped herself in her cape, opening the door slightly. He was fully dressed and wore an impatient look.

"Yes?" She asked, her voice groggy.

"We have a meeting with my father later today so I wanted to do something before then."

"Okayâ€|what?"

"Research."

She raised a brow.

"I'll explain it on the way thereâ€|just get dressed."

She closed her door and grabbed her bindings and tunic, she was

nearing her monthly so the tight bindings made her tender chest ache but she sucked it up. After her little stunt she couldn't afford even the slightest bulge at her chest.

She came out of the room five minutes later and the two fell in a stride together as they walked through the palace.

"Where to?" She asked.

"The palace archivesâ€¦remember we said we should research on Nidhogg and see if we can dig up anything on all these mysteries?"

Astrid's memory of being the cavern was still a bit shaky, but she did recall a conversation going something like that. Nodding she figured it was a good enough idea. Despite the large dragon attack looming over them, if they survived it there still seemed to be bigger matters to attend to.

The archives were located next to the history galley, and housed complete documents of the history of the royals, the Vikings, and their beliefs. Gothi and some of her scribes were always recording the important events of the society, some were traveling others were stationed on Berk, but if there were any answers on Nidhoggâ€¦it would be there.

Hiccup and Astrid lit torches and let themselves in, the room was seldom gone into and cobwebs attached to almost everything.

"How are the archives organizedâ€¦?" Astrid asked, some of the books were so old the titles on the sides were faded.

"By subject and dateâ€¦" Hiccup said, lifting his torch up, reading the labels atop the shelves. "Over hereâ€¦!"

Astrid followed him, it was a section on Viking lore, ancient lore of the Gods and the times before their people were even on the map.

"Why do you think it would be here?" She asked. "Should we check the royal scrolls? Maybe someone battled Nidhogg?"

"Nah, it's best to start at the beginning." He said. "Look for anything that has to do with Nidhoggâ€¦or just dragons in general."

She scanned the shelvesâ€¦most of them were about Odin, Loki, the messengers of the high Gods, Yggdrasil. Next to the book on Yggdrasil was something that while old, seemed legible.

"The one with the Dragon Heartâ€¦" Astrid read aloud. It should more like a story of fiction than a historical document of lore, but she picked it up anyways, blowing off the thin coat of dust. The book was very fancy and small for its heftiness. "Hmmâ€¦Hiccup!"

"Did you find something?" Hiccup rounded the corner back to her.

"I think so." She held up the book and the two sat down and Hiccup extinguished his torch to hold the book while Astrid's kept hers for a source of light. He flipped through the pages delicately. It was all very detailed with its illustrations but written in a language

that Astrid couldn't distinguish.

"I don't know any of these charactersâ€|" Hiccup knit his brow together, looking frustrated.

"Where are they fromâ€|?"

"They look oriental." Astrid had recalled Hiccup saying he knew some Roman, but other languages weren't as known to him. Lack of access was probably the issue.

Hiccup frowned, but still looked intently at the pages. They were heavily detailed in their artwork.

"If the pictures are anything to go by it looks like this tree is the center of the midgardâ€|"

"Like Yggdrasil?" Astrid blinked, wondering what Viking beliefs were doing in an oriental book. She followed Hiccup's fingers as they slid down the picture.

"Yeahâ€| and "â€" he pointed to the bottom of the picture, the roots of Yggdrasil encased a dark figure, its eyes were bright and its wings curved and cramped.

"A dragonâ€|?" Astrid exhaled.

"At the roots of Yggdrasilâ€|" Hiccup finished for her.

Astrid had learned enough about her heritage, the basics of the gods, the concept and structure of their world, the royal history of their people. But never had she heard of a dragon encased at the roots of the tree of life.

"I'll bet you anything this is Nidhogg." Hiccup said darkly. He flipped the page, a picture of a warrior fighting off Nidhogg, his chest glowing. Hiccup seemed a bit shocked, his eyes staying locked on the one spot of the page.

"What is it?" Astrid asked. "Do you know something?"

Hiccup looked up at, and whether it was the low light in the room or her own interpretation there seemed to be a darkness within his eyes. He stared at her for a while before speaking.

"Promise you won't tell anyone this time?" He said, a biting gnaw in his words. She felt the sting and almost jumped but nodded all the same.

"I promiseâ€|"

"I had a dream while we were in the cavern yesterday," he started, staring blankly forward. "I think I was at Yggdrasilâ€| and there was this girl there, her chest was glowing and she was fighting off a serpent with this giant weapon she just pulled out of the light."

Astrid tried to take it all in, but he was rambling so many things that made no sense.

"Andâ€|"?

"Andâ€|" he chewed his lip. "I think this bookâ€|this 'one with the dragon heart'â€|what if it was the girl in my dream? It fits the picture. What if Nidhogg is coming and only that girl can defeat himâ€|? Then what old wrinkly said about taking a girlâ€|?"

"Wait, wait, waitâ€|" Astrid almost dropped her torch. "Hiccup you're basing this all off of a dream you had while passing out from heat exhaustionâ€|and a book that you can only interpret the pictures?"

"What other leads do we have, Alastair?" Hiccup said loudly. "There is a Nidhoggâ€|and Toothless seems to be his son, and I don't think that dream and this book being so similar is a coincidence."

Astrid couldn't argue on that noteâ€|but inside she felt a twinge of disappointment. It was so silly, too, but she felt odd that what Hiccup's grandfather had said about taking a girl didn't have to do with herâ€|but with some girl with a glowing chest. She felt a bit foolish. Hiccup was entangled in a destiny far beyond her axe and fighting skills. And yet she still wanted to be by his side.

"We need to find someone who can read this book, then."

"Oriental isn't common knowledge around hereâ€|" Hiccup said, frowning before perking up. "But I know someone who would definitely know how to read this!"

"Whoâ€|?"

"Trader Johann. He's well traveledâ€|he probably knows 13 different languages literally and verbally."

Astrid knew of himâ€|but not personally. "Is he pulling into Berk any time soon?" She asked.

"Noâ€|he won't be making a round back here for at least another 5 months."

"Damnâ€|"

Suddenly footsteps entered the room and Hiccup and Astrid snapped up, seeing the village elder, Gothi, walking in.

"Gothi," Hiccup stood, bowing quickly. "I'm sorry we were justâ€""

She raised a hand, shushing him, but took a look at the book they were reading. Astrid kept seated, holding the torch.

"You wouldn't happen to know anything about who wrote this bookâ€|would you?"

Gothi only flipped a few pages of the book, leaving it open on a certain page before walking away.

"She's oddâ€|" Astrid said. She had never really seen the elder of the royal isle before, but rumor had it that she possessed special insight beyond any other spiritual expert among the Vikingsâ€|but she

traded her voice to the spirits to obtain it. If Hiccup's grandfather knew of their secrets, there was no doubt Gothi did as well. The thought left Astrid with a strange sense of crawling skin and a slight shiver. She clutched the torch tightly while Hiccup sat down next to her again, looking at the page Gothi had left open for him.

"Anything important?" She asked, and Hiccup peeled away what seemed to be a piece of parchment stuck between the pages.

"It's a letterâ€|in our language" Hiccup said.

"From who?"

"Don't knowâ€|but it says: _In many of my travels and dragon studies I've found that the lore of Nidhogg is the best kept secret among them. Eagerly they wait for his awakening, and for the world to once again belong to the winged ones. I know I am not the one with the dragon heart, but if I can get past Jormungandr and make it beyond the borders I might be able to confirm what I feel is comingâ€|_" Hiccup placed the note down, thinking.

"You think the girl you saw in your dream is the one with the dragon heartâ€|?" Astrid asked.

"Well how else do you explain a glowing chestâ€|" Hiccup asked. "And who is Jormungandrâ€|?"

Astrid _knew _she had heard of that before, she just had to think for a secondâ€|.

Her aunt had mentioned it before she was sailed off to pay tribute to Odin. Ones who are worthy are let to pass through by Jormungandrâ€|the one who encircles the edge of the world.

"It's a serpentâ€|who encircles Midgard. He blocks off any humans from leaving."

"So then whatever we need to know is beyond Midgardâ€|" Hiccup said.

"Hold on there, one step at a time, Prince Hiccup. We need this book to be translatedâ€|which means we need to find Trader Johann."

Hiccup closed the book loudly, dust flying up.

"And we need to ask Toothless what he knows about thisâ€|no more secretsâ€|"

Astrid swallowed. "Rightâ€|no more secretsâ€|" They both stood.

"But thenâ€|if this girl is the one with the dragon heartâ€|" he touched his chest, clutching his own tunic. "What does my power meanâ€|?"

Astrid bit her lip. "I wish I knewâ€|but it has to mean something."

Hiccup bit his lip as well. "Yeahâ€|is it weird that I'm afraid to

find out what?"

"Not at all." She touched his shoulder gently. "I'm afraid too."

0o0

The meeting Stoick had called was much bigger than Hiccup expected, when he and Alastair entered the room they realized the entire battalion of the King's Warrior's was there, lined up and dressed in mail and medal covered capes alike. Hiccup felt a bit smug, knowing for the first time that he had a medal on his cape as well. He and Alastair made their way to the front, Hiccup sitting in the chair next to his father, and Alastair stood at attention by his side.

Snotlout was there, standing with the other warriors despite his injury still being long from healed. He glowered at them, particularly Alastair.

"Everyone!" Stoick stood, raising his arms in announcement. "Thanks to my son, and his protector Alastair Hofferson, we've been blessed with a chance to advance on our enemies. A dragon attack is coming, and we're going to spend as much time as possible training all of you to make sure the Vikings win this battle."

The room was silent, many warriors with wide eyes. Hiccup could relate, the last dragon attack that called for a meeting beforehand was the one that took so many warriors away|Atlas included. Though he'd never mention that to Alastair.

"Everyone is to report to the Kill Ring in twenty minutes, an all day intensive training is beginning today." Stoick said, and then turned to Alastair. "You as well Warrior Hofferson."

Alastair blinked looking at Hiccup.

"But, King Stoick|I'm supposed to|." He looked at Hiccup, but Hiccup already knew where this was going.

As far as Stoick was concerned, Alastair's trial period was finished.

"You're needed in this fight, Alastair, we need every man, and you've more than proved yourself capable. I'm appointing you to be one of my warriors."

Hiccup saw the shock on Alastair's face, a small smile, a frown, a gulp, and a shiver. It all ran through him in a matter of seconds. He took a step towards the edge of Hiccup's seat, almost reclining the offer.

Hiccup stood as well, turning to face the boy and placed two hands on his shoulders.

"You've earned this Alastair|it's what you wanted, right?"

"You know that's not how it is anymore|" Alastair whispered, trying to not let the king hear. "I need to stay with you."

Stoick cleared his throat and Hiccup turned to face his father.

"Alastair's just a little shaken up that's all."

"Very well, take a few moments and meet with the rest of the warriors in the kill ring in twenty minutes." The warriors disbanded, some looking happy, others worried. Alastair still stood frozen, being appointed to a warrior a whole month early probably would've seemed more appealing earlier on. But Hiccup knew Alastair had a different mindset then when he was first assigned to watch himâ€|when all the warrior saw was a selfish screw-up of a prince.

He swallowed, wondering when things became so complicatedâ€|when his goals had become so much more complex. He turned to face Alastair again, leading him to the corner of the room while the other warriors collected themselves.

"I'll get started on our flight vestsâ€|" He whispered. "You just get through training today, alright?"

"What about Toothlessâ€|" Alastair asked.

"I'll visit him and try and get some answers out of him."

"No, Prince Hiccupâ€|don't go out in the forest alone. We don't know when the dragons are coming, I don't want you to getâ€""

"Hurt," Hiccup finished. "I know, but we need to start getting some answers now."

"But I won't be around toâ€|" Alastair trailed, looking down at his boots. Hiccup blinked, feeling a pull at his own chest, a knot in his stomach. Friendship was an odd connection, something that when pulled apart left him feeling naked almost. He never liked to come to grips with the fact that Alastair's assignment to him was always only temporary. But now at such a crucial time, they had to be separated. And what if he failed and had to leaveâ€|?

Would Alastair still go with him now that he had what he had come to Berk for?

"You're still stationed in my room, so we'll catch up tonight, alright?" Hiccup said softly. "Don't train too hard."

Alastair only nodded, trying to look strong but Hiccup could see the warrior crumble a bit. It made him feel a bit special, knowing Alastair felt the same rip by them not having an excuse to constantly pair up anymore.

Hiccup let out a weak laugh. "And to think just yesterday you mentioned your oath to my father to protect meâ€|" he frowned. "I guess that'sâ€|"

"I did take an oath to your fatherâ€|butâ€|"

The boy stepped closer for a moment, pulling the hair out of his eyes and looking Hiccup dead in the eyes. Hiccup swallowed, such an occurrence never happened so closely together. Alastair took his hand, bringing it up so he clasped it tightly between their faces. He

gave him a hard look, dead serious.

"I'm taking one to you right now. Through all this dragon madness, my loyalty is to you first and foremost, not as a duty to the king but as my duty and friendship to youâ€|.my princeâ€|" She bowed lightly towards him. And Hiccup blinked.

Alastair had told him the reason he was so secretive about his personal space was a deformation at his chestâ€|.Hiccup tried desperately to believe it but something told him it was just another weird secret of his. Toothless had grown annoyed by Hiccup's ignorance about the matter but Hiccup just couldn't bring himself to draw any more wild conclusions.

He sensed a bigger logic to Alastair's secrets, but he wouldn't allow himself to dig deeper. A part of him didn't want to know while the other wanted to desperately search until he did know.

Still, he searched his eyes again, trying to read the boy's mind. He got a blank response. The blue of his irises was intense, captivating. Something was hiding behind there, something that left a spark in his eyes that not even Hiccup could read.

"Hiccupâ€|" Alastair said, almost so softly Hiccup didn't hear him. Stillâ€|Alastair had pledged loyalty to him and him alone.

"Are you two going to kiss or what?"

Hiccup took one large step back out of habit, and only then did he realize how close he and Alastair were standing to begin with. He saw Snotlout laughing, his shoulder still bandaged, but it was out of its sling.

"What do you want?" Alastair growled.

"It's going to beâ€|interesting to have you on board Alastair. I was sure you were playing for a different team."

"What's that supposed to mean, youâ€"" Alastair began but Hiccup stood in front of him in a protective fashion.

"Leave him alone, Snotlout. Or do I have to put you in your place again?"

Snotlout's eyes cut between them and he just laughed.

"You think because you stabbed me with those shaky hands of yours that you're warranted to make threats now?"

Hiccup felt an old anger bubble up in him and he ripped out his dagger from his waist belt, flipping it in his fingers. "Yup," he said simply.

"Yeah well I guess you've gotta protect your girlfriend somehow."

"Enough! I'm tired of the mother and the girlfriend comments. Just because Alastair cares about me doesn't mean that there'sâ€"" he stopped when he felt Alastair's hand on his shoulder, he turned looking at him.

"Just stop it, Prince Hiccup, he's only baiting you. We don't have to waste our time explaining anything to him."

Hiccup looked back at Snotlout, the challenge in his bones was fighting but he resisted, putting his dagger back.

They had to focus on fighting dragons, not each other.

0o0

Alastair left promptly for warrior's training and Hiccup spent the next few hours starting the flight vests. He knew he had to hurry, but wouldn't sacrifice the quality of the suits just because he was short on time. He'd pay for it later for sure.

Arte stayed in his room, changing his bed linen and generally tidying up. She never touched his smithy, though.

"Need me to do anything else?" Arte asked dryly.

"Nope, that should be good." He told her, never looking up from his desk.

"And what are you doing?"

"If it was any of your business I'd tell you, now wouldn't I?" Hiccup glared at her but Arte leaned against the door post.

"Grouchy because you're missing your other half?"

He slammed his charcoal stick down.

"So what if I am? That's how friends are when they're separated. But I know your mind's still reeling at the fact that I have a friendâ€¦isn't it Arte?"

"Someone's wound tightlyâ€¦." Was all she said, a snicker in her voice.

"Yeah I amâ€¦" He exhaled and stood, closing his sketchbook with the designs in it and taking it with him. As he shoved past Arte and went to put on his boots.

"And where are you going?" She asked.

"For a walk, I need to clear my head."

"Your father doesn't want you going out, Prince Hiccup, I don't think that'sâ€""

He paid her no heed, though, slamming the door loudly on the way out.

0o0

Hiccup felt like a ton of weight was over him as he huffed in a wide stride to the cove.

His ears kept popping no matter how much he swallowed and dug his

pinky into his ear. He could hear far away voices, but not his own, and he swallowed. The dragons were coming soon, and it was surely a lot more than they faced while escaping the nest.

He quickened his walk before he reached the cove, knowing the route by heart. Hiccup wondered just how many times he had made the trek back and forth from cove to palace. Usually he'd have Alastair by his side, they'd be arguing no doubt, and then he'd be greeted by Toothless and take that magnificent flight up in the air where everything disappeared but the wind in his hair and a boundless sky ahead of them.

He loved those days, and almost wished they could stay like that. Alastair would still be his protector, Toothless his friend, their secret would be theirs and theirs alone, and somehow they'd keep the frisson of the treachery as a fuel to keep going in a society that went against their natural inclination to live.

He climbed down the rocks, Toothless walking up to greet him.

_:::Can you feel it?::: _Toothless asked.

:::Yeahâ€|they're comingâ€|and their strongâ€|.::

:::When the time comes I want you to go with your people, they'll protect you much better than I can.::

Hiccup blinked, not having even told Toothless that Alastair had blabbed to his father about the dragon attack. But then at the rate his thoughts were spiraling as he came in the cove it probably made sense that Toothless figured it out.

Hiccup did, however, wonder what the depth perception of their link was. He was able to find him in the dragon's nest and talk to him all the way on the other side of the volcano, so it had to be at least a decent distance. He made a mental note to start testing their link more. It would come in handy if they got separated.

Still, Toothless's request left an odd taste in his mouth.

_:::Humans with swords or a deadly night furyâ€|hmmm, yeah, I wonder who I'll be safer with?::: _Hiccup said dryly and Toothless rolled his eyes, sitting.

:::It's a matter of keeping this as low to the ground as possible.::

:::But the other dragons already know that we rideâ€|.what else can they do that they already haven't tried?:::

_:::It's not that they'll try anything new, it's that they'll succeed in what they're doing. I just want you to be safeâ€|.::_Toothless looked away, seeming embarrassed. But Hiccup felt that same affection. He didn't have any siblings, but he figured the bond they had was brotherly enough. Toothless was like his older brother, of course, and in certain ways so was Alastair. As much as it made him sigh at being the youngest sibling he still smiled nonetheless.

He'd found a family in those twoâ€|even if they kept their secrets from him.

Speaking of whichâ€|. .

_:::Toothlessâ€|::: _Hiccup sat as well, scooting closer to the night fury, though he wouldn't lean against him. This was serious-talk. Toothless perked his head up, sensing that.

_:::Yesâ€|?::: _Toothless responded.

:::Alastair and I did some research on Nidhogg in the palace archives. I know you have something familial to do with Nidhoggâ€|he's your fatherâ€|the one who made youâ€|I don't knowâ€|.but I know it has something to do with this secret all the dragons are keepingâ€|and something about the one with the dragon heart.:::

Hiccup felt a slip in Toothless's mental block, the pure shock lowered his walls momentarily.

Hiccup frantically searched, but he only seemed to snatch out the fear Toothless hadâ€|.fear that Hiccup wouldâ€|.

_:::Toothlessâ€|why do you think I'd kill youâ€|.?::: _Hiccup asked. Almost shocked by the words he was saying.

Toothless turned his nose away, shamed.

_:::Tell me why!::: _Hiccup stressed further. Yelling at Toothless never solved anything, of course, but his emotions bubbled forth in nothing but a yell.

:::The one with the dragon heart is our biggest enemy. They destroyed the dragon's rising centuries ago and it's coming upon the time for them to be rebornâ€|you overheardâ€|anyone with powers like yours is dangerous to our kindâ€|.::

Hiccup breathed. _Finally _some information. _:::And this purpose you serve to Nidhoggâ€|.?:::_

No answer.

:::Toothless!:::

:::It wouldn't do either of us any good if you knew.:::

_:::You don't think I can handle knowingâ€|.?::: _Hiccup's voice calmed, falling, head first, into realization. _:::Is it that badâ€|.?:::_

Toothless almost answered, but didn't biting back his words, but Hiccup felt the confirmation being bitten back. Toothless had a past he didn't want to talk aboutâ€|Hiccup had a power that endangered his kind. They were almost on extreme sides of the spectrum and yet there they wereâ€|.together.

And Toothless, a deadly night fury, was holding back telling Hiccup, not because he was trying to mysterious, but because he didn't want to ruin their friendshipâ€|.

Hiccup chewed his cheek, wondering if that was Alastair's reasoning

as well?

Hiccup scooted forward more, taking Toothless's chin in his palm and hugged him. The night fury went stiff, the concept of a human hug was strange to himâ€| just as strange as hugging a dragon was to Hiccup, but he pushed forth regardless.

Hugging tighter, Hiccup tried to let every reassuring thought he could pour out from him. How much he appreciated Toothless sticking with him, for not eating him when he had the chanceâ€| so many chances. For rescuing him and Alastair instead of being loyal to his own kind. For going along with his crazy idea of ending a war that had gone on for centuries before either of them were conceived.

_:::Iâ€|hope you're not the one with the dragon heartâ€| .::: _Toothless finally said, a large pain in his voice.

_:::I'm not .::: _Hiccup told him. The dream he had, the girl fighting off Jormungandrâ€|she was the one with the dragon heartâ€|not him.
:::I have these powersâ€|but I don't know why .:::

:::There are only a few explanationsâ€|none of which make this any easier .:::

Hiccup nodded into Toothless's neck. _:::After this battle is over, you, me, and Alastairâ€|we're going to go find the one with the dragon heart and talk to herâ€|try and see if we can convince her not toâ€|kill youâ€|?::: _Hiccup didn't know what ties Toothless had to the one with the dragon heart, but he was fearful of Hiccup killing himâ€|so, he drew the conclusion based on those points alone.

:::Herâ€|?:::

:::A dream I hadâ€|of someone with a glowing chest and a weapon...it was a girl, she must be the one with the dragon heart. Maybeâ€|maybe I was given these powers to find herâ€|?:::

Toothless was silent.

:::Do you know anything elseâ€|Toothlessâ€|?:::

:::I know enough, but I don't know everything. Some of my duties are still under shadows. My next meeting with Nidhogg was supposed to be soon, butâ€|?:::

Hiccup nodded again. He couldn't go nowâ€|.

_:::We just have to make it through this battle no matter what. Which means we have to protect each otherâ€|you me and-::: _Hiccup looked out beyond the cove, the low sun cresting the cliffs.

:::-Alastairâ€|?:::

:::Where is the sun-haired one?:::

:::Training with the other warriors. My father promoted him to the militaryâ€|.but Alastair's loyal to me, he'll come with us when he start our search .:::

:::You miss her?:::

:::He's my friend, of course I miss himâ€|:::

_:::Yet you've only been separated for a few hours.::: _Toothless read his mind.

:::I thinkâ€|I think it's the fact that we really don't have the excuse to keep being together anymore. Alastair isn't assigned to me soâ€|he'll be stationed with warriors nowâ€|:::

Toothless sniffed at him, rearing back and almost looking like he was _smirking._

_:::What?::: _Hiccup curled his lip up, a wrinkle under his cheek.

:::Love amongst humans is the most complicated occurrence. So much happens before the mating.:::

Hiccup's face scrunched even more.

_:::Hey, whoa, whoa, whoaâ€|what are you getting at?::: _Hiccup was already sick of Snotlout calling Alastair his girlfriend. It was a juvenile insult at best, as it was customary to do so to two males who were close to each other. Such bonds were frowned upon in Viking society, relationships of a romantic nature were for mating, bringing more Vikings in the world and making sure they were strong and healthy.

:::What do you think?:::

_:::Toothless me and Alastair can'tâ€|I mean, we don'tâ€|weâ€|..::: _Did he really have to explain thisâ€|? Toothless seemed smart enough to know that two males couldn't 'â€|.

_:::Your body temperature is spiking.::: _Toothless still smirked.

_:::That's becauseâ€|..! Look, Toothless, me and Alastair are friends, we're like brothers. All of us are.::: _He grabbed a fistful of grass in a nervous fidget. _:::I care about both of you, but not likeâ€|I meanâ€|we're just all friends, you knowâ€|?::: _Hiccup sighed.

:::Despite all these secrets.:::

_:::Secrets are sometimes necessary to keep things the way you want themâ€|::: _Toothless said.

:::What do you mean?:::

:::You have this own fantasy of yours, of wanting life to be me, you, and herâ€|stuck in this little hole in the groundâ€|.but it's simply not reality.:::

_:::I know thatâ€|::: _Hiccup lowered his gaze. That _is _what he wanted, but he knew it couldn't be. They had to find out more on this dragon heart, had to find, her, save Toothless from whatever grasp Nidhogg had on him.

If Hiccup's destiny was to find this girl with his powersâ€|he'd do

so.

Hiccup then heard a screech in the sky and his head spiked up. Toothless's ears perked and he ran to the other side of the cove, looking upwards seriously.

Hiccup's heart dropped.

::They're here.:: Toothless said, a little too calmly.

Hiccup jumped on his first reflex, shoving Toothless into the shadowy area near the tree in the cove.

::We should stay hereâ€| and wait for Alastair.:: Hiccup said.

::But she won't-::

::He'll comeâ€|.I know Alastair.::

::And you think a few leafy shadows will hide us?::

::Well we're a lot lower to the ground than if we climb up to the forest.:: Hiccup sniffled. He could feel all the blood rushing to his head even though he was right-side up. There was a lightheaded dizziness circling him and encasing all his thoughts with apprehension.

Toothless stood closer to him, and they both reared back as far in the shadows as they could.

The sky far away looked disfigured. Blood red with vomits of greens and browns, it was unsettling that the sky could be that color. But Hiccup's nose bled when he realized that it wasn't the sky turning that colorâ€|it was the wide expanse of dragons covering the sky.

Filled with hatred, misguided fear of the unknown, and all the will power to kill without remorse Hiccup heard the taunts, the battle roars, and the flaps of their wings almost sounded like waves crashing against the harbor because of the sheer volume of dragons flying towards them.

The sky was being swallowed up by a swarm of dragons coming towards Berk, all charging to kill just because Hiccup resided there.

And let the battle chapter commence!

Next time there's gonna be lots of crap going down that you don't wanna miss it.

Review Responses:

StorSpeaker: Well as a reader, I think Astrid made the right choice. Both Hiccup and Astrid have their moments of poor judgment, but in this case Hiccup was being a bit silly thinking he could defeat the whole army on his own and yeahâ€|it was explained in this chapter XD Lets see how the military fairs with only a few hours of training before the big battle.

Ferdos: Nah, Hiccup's not stupidâ€|.he knows something's up with Astrid/Alastair, but it's half of him wanting to know cause it's bothering him and half not wanting to know and deal with whatever she is hiding.

Riders of Doom: Astrid was slick and only said what was needed without blabbing about Hiccup's abilities. She's not **_*that **_***mean. But she didn't want Hiccup to go fight dragons on his own and get killedâ€|and get other people killed.**

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

A Random Fan: Thank you! I'm glad the development is good, cause that's really the core of the story for me is how Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid develop of the 5 or 6 parts I have planned for this story. And all shall be revealed with the Astrid/Alastair plot in due time. Patience.

92fireDemon: Thank you, the next chapter will hopefully be epic as well!

Teen Nightfury: Haha, well at least I got the surprise factor down. And I never intended for Astrid to spill Hiccup's secret when she told Stoick. She didn't want Hiccup to fight dragons alone but she knows that telling Stoick about Hiccup's abilities is Hiccup's business with his father and not hers. And I wish I could say who that girl was, but I can't. Hiccup's pretty determined to find out, though.

Guest 1: Sorry, this chapter had a cliffhanger as well XD.

Guest 2: Yeah, I couldn't really get around the romantic flight without it being romantic for Astridâ€|cause she does have feelings for Hiccup now. And Hiccup's got a lot of denial about what he thinks "Alastair" is hiding. He wants to knowâ€|but then he doesn't. He likes the little he's in, but he then he hates the secretsâ€|it's very confusing for Hiccup right now. And haha, that dream is gonna throw you guys for such a loopâ€|can't wait to see people's reactions.

Pjfan: Wish I could say if you're right or not, but no spoilers. It's nice that you did research though (or just already knew?) XD

Daughter of sea and wisdom: Nah, he's not a moronâ€|he's got a lot on his plate, and he's in constant denial. He wants answersâ€|but then doesn't because he knows he probably won't like the answer. It's quite complicated for him. And Astrid simply doesn't want Hiccup going off to fight dragons alone and getting himselfâ€"and other peopleâ€"killed. And haha, nightmares? But yeahâ€|she's a mother to Toothless, not so much the other dragons biologicallyâ€|they just call her mother because that's basically her role within the nest.

Httydloverforever1: I can't say when Astrid's "big reveal" isâ€|just keep reading. All will be revealed in due time.

Sunshine. is .delicious: Thank you!

Prayergirl: Yeah, Hiccup was being a bit silly in wanting to handle it all on his own, but Astrid didn't want him going off and doing that and getting killed. So yeah, they did have to say something. So it's good that the warriors were given a heads up but only by a few hours XD

Thanks for all the reviews everyone! Next chapter is sure hopefully to please!

Next Chapter: Attacked and Worsened

13. Attacked and Worsened

Probably should've just named this chapter "lots of crazy crap happens", but anyways let's just dive right into the chapter, shall we?

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Thirteen: Attacked and Worsened

Astrid felt a breeze hit her skin as the sword lightly grazed her skin, she doubled back on the pads of her feet, skidding on the stone floor of the Kill Ring.

"Hey, no injuring! Remember the King's orders." She called out to her sparring partner: Snotlout.

"Sorry, I guess my guard dropped off." He shrugged with a challenging curl to his lip. Astrid looked down at the wooden guard, it had indeed fallen off, but she hardly guessed it was a matter of mistake. Wiping her brow she decided to tend to the stinging slit-cut another time.

Of all people she had to be paired with Snotlout, he was operating on one arm and still was able to hold his own, and cut her. She hissed, hating to admit that the warrior duke really was as talented as he was given credit for.

"You're still a decent fighter, Alastair!" He jumped back a bit, giving that same challenge. "For a girl."

Astrid dropped her sword. It clanked against the stone and in a ring filled with fighting all she was able to concentrate on was those three words. Words she had feared hearing for weeks.

"Your expression says it all so don't even try to deny it."

She chewed her lip. Her delayed response had already cost her any chance of denying it naturally. Her next move had to be smart, she could work over shock later but still she felt her eyes sting. Why was everything happening this way of all ways?

She simply came to Berk to avenge her brother and somehow she got mixed into a mess of trying to end a war and falling for the prince of Berk as well.

There was nothing to she could say to get around it. Astrid could

tell in Snotlout's eyes that he wasn't just taking a wild stab in the dark in asking. _He knew _and if she couldn't convince him otherwise, then it was time to figure out _how _he knew.

"What do you want, Snotlout?" She said, picking up her sword and whipping it back, readying her stance.

The warrior duke played along with her, readying his sword as well. They both lunged forward, iron meeting iron in loud clanks, arms twisting and skills colliding in an exhausting panic as Astrid let out every frustration in each lunge.

"How do you knowâ€|?" she asked, strained.

"Better question is how is my cousin so stupid that he _doesn't _know?"

She let out a cry, whipping her sword straight for his neck in blinded anger, but he dodged it, almost effortlessly.

"So I ask again,"â€"another swingâ€" "what do you want, Snotlout?"

"There are endless possibilities as to what I can do with that information." Snotlout smirked. "And I intend to use it for the best reason possible."

"Peh, best for _you._" Astrid rolled her eyes, locking their blades and their eyes. "I swear to Odin, Snotlout, if you hurt Hiccup I'llâ€""

"Go ahead and try," Snotlout said. "And I'll have you beheaded for treasonâ€|on multiple accounts."

Her eyes widened again, falling back, her hair came loose from the band she put it in and all of her locks fell forward.

She heard Snotlout's boots walk towards her, but she didn't get up, even as he picked her up by the arm and stared her dead in the eyes.

"Look at youâ€|in your female shame, trying to avenge your pitiful brotherâ€|." Snotlout bit at her desperation again. Her brows curledâ€|.he knew that Atlas was her brother as wellâ€|.

"What do you-?"

"That coward died because he wouldn't kill a dragon when it really matteredâ€|he gave in to those savages at the last minute, and look what happened."

"Atlas died becauseâ€|." She swallowed. Had he come to realize that killing dragons aimlessly wasn't the answer as well? And yet, a dragon still killed him while he showed it mercyâ€|

Tears stung her eyes yet again, but she had no willpower to pick up her sword and fight anymore. What was the pointâ€|? Snotlout was going to say everything he knew eventually, and who knew how much else he knew? Maybe he knew everything about Toothless as wellâ€|? She swallowed again, her breath felt course and pinning as it

traveled down. The back of her throat was too dry to gag but she felt like she was going to hurl.

"Ey, look up in the air!" They heard a call from the other side of the ring and Astrid lifted her head slowly, looking overhead to see a cloud of dragons flying towards Berk. And cloud was putting it lightly it was more like a typhoon of dragons weaving within the sky.

The roars filled her ears before she saw the first strike, it barreled down straight for the Kill Ring, most of the warriors were there training to protect the village and yet, most of them were taken out within the first strikes the dragons delivered. All of the strikes were perfectly calculated, charring, and Astrid opened her eyes but all she saw was black smoke and burning bodies.

Her own pant leg brushed with flames and she patted it down, her palms sizzling.

The gronckles strikes were like bombs, and they just kept dropping as she heard the cries of her comrades continue, but all she could do was cover her head.

A strike landed close to her and she was jutted up, smashing into the chains over the ring before crashing back down into the stone, her shoulder crunched but it didn't seem broken. Not yet, at least.

Was this what a real dragon raid was like? She wondered.

Smoke cleared and she brushed a few more chars off her leggings, her hair whipped in the bloodstained wind as she saw that the group of dragons was breaking off into sets. Some stayed at the Kill Ring, others went towards the village more towards the forest.

Her eyes widened.

"Hiccup!" She mouthed and hobbled up. Her pant leg had been burnt through, and her leg felt raw, but she grabbed whatever weapon was on the ground next to her and held her aching shoulder, walking out of the ring as best she could.

Everything else was falling apart but she wouldn't lose Hiccup.

She couldn't.

0o0

A distant pang of death rang in Hiccup's ears as he and Toothless huddled in the shadows. It was uncomfortable for them both, cowering like that, But Toothless stayed defensively in front, willing any dragon to mess with his human.

Hiccup had his knees to his mouth, mumbling for it all to end soon against his legs.

Toothless's tail came up and grazed his cheek, a comforting gesture.

::I know it's hard to listen to.:: _Toothless said. _::They're all being such.::__

_:::Dragonsâ€|?::: _Hiccup tried and Toothless bowed his head, shamefully almost.

_:::It's a title I become less and less proud ofâ€|.: _He looked up wishfully into the clouds, there was a red in them as the sun setâ€|forecasting the doom that was the raining over the village.

_:::You wish you were a human sometimesâ€|?::: _Toothless perked up as Hiccup asked. It was a strange thought that Hiccup picked up from Toothless, but the day had proven to be full of surprises.

But Toothless didn't provide further answers. Not because he closed off his thoughts as he usually did, but simply because he didn't _have _an answer.

Another wave of screams and dragon battle cries and cries of death filled Hiccup's ears. He shrank, covering his ears as he curled his body in fettle. Toothless curled around him, nudging him up with his nose.

_:::Be strong,: _Toothless offered.

_:::I'm tryingâ€|::: _Hiccup grunted. _:::But I can't just sit and cower here in the shadows while people are dying because of me.: _

Hiccup stood, whipping his eyes and walking out from the safety under the tree's cover.

_:::And what are you going to do?::: _Toothless asked. He was hardly trying to stop him, but it was a reasonable question.

Hiccup turned, laughing shamelessly to himself. _:::I have no idea.::_

_:::Valiant.: _Toothless teased. _:::I'm sure we'll figure out something.::_

:::We always do.::

Hiccup mounted the night fury, they both shared the same determinationâ€|and fear. But they flew ahead regardless.

_:::The moment they see us riding they're going to attack.: _Toothless warned.

_:::So we'll just have to attack first.: _Hiccup said and they landed momentarily in a high tree. It overlooked almost all of Raven Point Forest, and the village. He looked over to see multiple pillars of smoke billowing from the town, none at the palace yetâ€|.but that was sure to come.

Hiccup's ears tinged in the cries again and he reached to cover them, but stopped. If he was going to charge into the fray he just had to bear it. He looked over in the farthest distance he could seeâ€|the Kill Ring.

It was completely engulfed in flames.

Hiccup swallowed.

"Alâ€|. Alastairâ€|." He choked.

::We'll go there first.: _Toothless said, his emotions barrowed in as they flew over to the heated and smoke. Embers filled the plumes and Hiccup smelt the charring flesh, it made him want to yak more so with the knowledge that it could possibly be Alastair.

"Please, please, please, please, please." He chanted, praying to the Gods that at least one warrior in the training ring had been spared.

They landed in the far off rocky distance on the same cliff as the ring, staying stationed in a shadowy area.

::Do you see her?:

::No, the smoke's still too thick.: Hiccup pulled up the reigns wanting to fly in there but Toothless wouldn't budge. _::Come on Tooth-:_

::Do you really want to fly in there on me? How would that look if anyone's still alive?:

"_If anyone's still aliveâ€|" Hiccup felt his heart skip and he jumped off of Toothless.

::I'll be on the watch if anything happens.: _Toothless promised and Hiccup ran as fast as he could to the ring. The smoke was too hot and it reminded him too much of when he was trapped in the volcano the previous day, but he pushed in.

The metal cage was broken in, some of it collapsed inâ€|. a few bars and roping chains had fallen on warriors, their limbs crushed under the rusting iron. He covered his mouth and made his way further inside. There were dead bodiesâ€"human and dragons alikeâ€"everywhere. He stumbled over a gronckle tail.

The dragon was on the last limbs of life, but still conscious.

::Humanâ€|: it groaned. _::Dirty humansâ€|kill us allâ€|kill meâ€|._:

Hiccup almost sympathized with it, it was the same chilling feeling when he heard Toothless dying up in the tree, only he looked over to the dragon's claws and saw that he had speared a man in the heart with his talons.

::A life for a lifeâ€|.: Hiccup told it, coldly.

He saw the dragon's eyes widen a bit, angry moisture collecting around his pupils.

::Youâ€|you areâ€|.: _the dragon knew who Hiccup wasâ€|the one all of this killed was going on because of. And that was its last breath before it collapsed fully onto the ground, dead. Its claws sunk further into the man as it's body relaxed. The noise of flesh being punctured was retched enough, and Hiccup kept walking, dead eyed.

It took five more minutes of walking aimlessly and almost zombie-like through the ring before he felt the need to sink to the ground. Coming to a daring grip that Alastair wasâ€œ!

"Alastair!" He called out, a desperate crack in his voice. The smoke filled his mouth while he cried out, and he could care less.

"Alastair please don't die like thisâ€œ." He hunched over, choking out tears. "Pleaseâ€œ!"

He looked aroundâ€œ| everything was quiet. It was the kind of quiet that was the scariest because despite being surrounded by so many people and dragons, there was no noise.

"Toothless!" he called and he turned to the entrance, seeing the night fury there for him. Toothless ran up, and pressed his nose to Hiccup's side.

:::Is she here?:::

_:::I couldn't find himâ€œ|he's probably cr-::: _Hiccup choked back the lump in his throat. _:::He's probably crushed under somethingâ€œ| .:::_

:::Maybe sheâ€œ|?:::

_:::All of Alastair's battalion was stationed here for trainingâ€œ|::: _Hiccup kept countering, not wanting the optimism. It hurt too much.

_:::I'm sorryâ€œ|::: _Toothless rested his head on Hiccup's shoulder, curling around him. Hiccup leaned back on Toothless, his original will to fight was building and fading within him at the same time. He threw his head back and cried out, hot tears continuously falling from his eyes, filling his ears, his mouth, staining his tunic.

All because he couldn't do his job. If he had just done something, protected the village like he wanted toâ€œ| maybe Alastair wouldn't have beenâ€œ|.

Could he even protect anyoneâ€œ|.? Was he really still as useless as he was before any of this started? He could hear what dragons were thinking for Thor's sakeâ€œ|and still he was useless.

He felt Toothless lick his cheek. Another dragon gesture of kindness, but he could hardly smile under the circumstances.

_:::There's still hopeâ€œ|you're not useless.::: _Toothless told him.

:::But if he's not here then where could he beâ€œ|? Why did itâ€œ"?:::

"Looks like this is going to be a day of revelations." Hiccup heard a voice. Perking up at the sign of any voice.

"Alastair!?" He said happily, but his heart sank further when he realized that it wasn't Alastair.

It was Snotlout.

The warrior duke was hobbling almost impossibly, a river of blood trailing behind him and Hiccup covered his mouth from screaming when he realized the blood trail was coming from the arm he had punctured.

An arm that was now ripped completely from the elbow.

"Sn-snotlout!"

"What? This? Small price for this beautiful scene of treason." Snotlout smiled. His eyes were unfocused, shocked, in pain, and still running on willpower or whatever drove Snotlout to act in such a way even after just having his arm bitten off. "The King-to-be being comforted by a dragon," Snotlout continued, laughing unsteadily. "Beautiful."

Of course out of all the battalion, Snotlout had to be the one to survive, even with such a grave injury.

"Go ahead and do whatever you want! I don't care." Hiccup hung his head, he felt like his own arm had been severed knowing that Alastair was gone. Snotlout could take him out rather effortlessly even with one arm! he'd probably get a medal for it once everyone learned that he was cavorting with a dragon.

Toothless growled, standing in front of Hiccup protectively.

_:::Why are you giving up?::: _Toothless asked bitingly. _:::What happened to your fighting spirit?::: _

:::Iâ€|I couldn't even protect Alastair and Iâ€":::

:::Do you think she'd want you to be this way?:::

Hiccup bit his lip. He knew what Toothless was getting at. Alastair would kick his ribs if he saw him submitting to Snotlout after he had managed to best him in a duel just a few weeks prior.

"Alastairâ€|is heâ€|?" Hiccup thought it best to ask, standing and shoving past Toothless. Snotlout smirked.

"How should I know where your little girlfriend is."

Hiccup felt his blood boil, the heat of the smoke and embers around him pulsed in his lungs, making him cough but jolting him forward with every gag. He pulled out his dagger from his waist sash, placing it to Snotlout's neck.

Snotlout was weak, running on adrenaline alone, but Hiccup was still fresh. His only blows were mental, and was able to overcome his cousin swiftly. He grabbed hold of the other armâ€"his only armâ€"and pulled at it. Snotlout gave a grunt.

"Don't play around with me, where is he?"

"Or what, you traitor?" Snotlout choked, running out of breath.

Hiccup looked down at Snotlout's arm, it was shaking, and he smirked.

"Or the other arm comes off."

Snotlout had a challenge in his eyes, but Hiccup knew he was matching it with his own gaze.

"Try me." Hiccup growled. "Now where's Alastair?"

"I don't know." Snotlout turned his nose the other way, frowning. "I barely kept myself alive, how was I supposed to keep tabs on who was dying and who wasn't?"

Hiccup felt his heart drop again. His anger dropped and he loosened his grip on the warrior duke. His boots were soaked with Snotlout's blood now, but he hardly mattered.

"And what about you? And that dragonâ€| I know that's what you and Alastair have been doing out in the woods. Both of you are filthy traitors. How do I know this whole raid isn't your fault?"

The sting hit Hiccup hard.

It was his fault, though not in the way Snotlout was implying.

"Alastair probably got what was coming, and I'm sure you will too if you don'tâ€"

Hiccup jolted forward again, the anger rising in him again, but this time it was murderous. He pressed the side of the dagger deep in Snotlout's skin, he felt the resisting sink, blood spilt over his blade and his fingers and he seemed to get a high off of hearing his cousin gag.

"Take that back!" Hiccup roared. But Snotlout only offered a gag.
"TAKE IT BACK!" He yelled again.

Toothless pulled him back, biting gently at the back of his tunic and dragging him across the stone. The dagger fell and Snotlout choked, falling to the ground. The wound wasn't as deep as Hiccup thought. But any time he penetrated skin with his blade it felt like it was cutting straight to the bone.

The chilling realization that the pain emitting from someone else egged him on, though. He shivered and leaned back against Toothless.

Don't be careless. Toothless said simply. You almost killed him.

Hiccup looked down at his hands, they were stained in blood. He whipped it down on his tunic but the red still seeped in the thin crevices of his finger prints and under his nails. He swallowed as he looked at Snotlout gagging on the ground.

Still, though, the warrior duke smirked.

"Still too weak to do it, huhâ€|?"

Hiccup's brows knitted, and he picked up his dagger placing it back in his waist sash and mounted Toothless.

_:::He's too stubborn to die.::: _Hiccup said, and just left him there as they flew off.

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Once they were air born yet again Hiccup realized that the palace was under attack.

_:::Looks like they got there.::: _Hiccup said dryly. After losing Alastair he felt like death was just going to be a theme of the evening. And he was still shocked at himself for actually wanting to kill Snotlout back there.

As that all he brought? Death?

_:::Focus, human.::: _Toothless chastised and Hiccup leaned forward, bearing down. _:::Are we going to assist your home first or go into the local area?::: _

Hiccup scanned the grounds. Everyone was in panic all over, dragons were infiltrating everything, going into houses, explosions and pools of fire came out of winds, smoke filled houses spit out people running as their backs set aflame. Cries over dead bodies as they got pick up themselves and flash was speared by dragon claws.

Hiccup watched almost in a sense of disconnect, eyes half lid and mouth slightly agape.

_:::My Dad's down there.::: _He said dryly once more. _:::Let's go make sure he's okay.::: _

They flew down off the tree once more and began to advance towards the village.

And the next events all seemed to happen in a haze.

Angry voices seemed to suddenly boom in Hiccup's ears.

_:::What are you doing here with this human again!?::: _Was what Hiccup could clearly make out before he felt claws ripping at his back, the skin was scrapped, though not cut. Hiccup yelped and fell nose first into the saddle.

_:::So you really are on the humans side now?::: _That same monstorous nightmare came up.

_:::I'm on whatever side ends all this senseless violence quicker.::: _Toothless snarled.

_:::Odd, coming from the one who will assist in ending it all.::: _The nightmare sneered. Toothless turned away.

_:::There's no point in killing all these humans like this.::: _

_:::You are right.::: _The nightmare almost grinned. _:::We just want yoursâ€|the one who talks to you.::: _

The nightmare's claws came at Hiccup again, but Toothless reared back, hissing.

_:::He's not the one you want.::: _Toothless bit.

_:::You say it so desperately. Do you even believe that?::: _The nightmare taunted and Toothless shot angrily at him.

_:::Toothless he's just baiting you-::: _Hiccup tried to warn before he was ripped off of Toothless. Zippleback claws dug in his skin and he groaned as they carried him off, easier since he had yet to complete a new riding vest.

"Toothless!" Hiccup called out as he saw Toothless spent his last air born moments getting smacked down by the nightmare's tail. Hiccup writhed in the grasp of the zippleback but it wouldn't let go.

_:::Don't try, human.::: _It said grimly.

_:::Mother will take care of you the right way this time.::: _Another added. Hiccup ground his teeth but sighed and went limp as he felt claws push past his skin, sinking in.

"Toothlessâ€|. " He breathed. "Alastairâ€|. I'm sorry. "

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Astrid hobbled through the forest, she had managed to pry Arte out of the palace and ask her where Hiccup had gone once she found his room empty.

"Warrior Hofferson you need medical attention!" _They shouted at her, but she paid no heed. None of it mattered anymore, just finding Hiccup and making sure he was safe. Everything else was going to go downhill after that anyways. Snotlout knew about her, after all.

There was a pebble lodged in her boot at the burning on her skin seemed to scab and leak at the same time but still she kept walking. Just make it to the cove.

She heard a crash from above her, though, and she wondered what curse Thor was brining upon her now, but instead it was Toothless, tumbling down towards her. He looked unstable, flexing his wings every which way to get some wind under him, but he toppled down in the ground, inches from Astrid, in a loud thud. She fell back from the impact.

"T-Toothless!" Astrid huffed out a gasp. "What are youâ€|. " She scanned him quickly. Hiccup was no where to be found. "Where's Hiccup?" her voiced softened.

But as soon as Toothless regained his bearings and took a look at her, he jumped on her and licked her happily.

Astrid laid on the ground, stunned. Why was Toothless so happy to see her?

"Where'sâ€?" she started to ask again slowly. But it was clear the two had gotten separated. She looked over back the village in the distance. "They took himâ€|didn't they?" Astrid asked instead, her eyes far away and her voice void.

Hiccup was supposedly who the dragons were after. He might not have been the one with the dragon heart, but whatever power he had was a threat to the nest. She looked at Toothless, who nudged her forward, looking in an urgent need to get back to the village.

"We'll have to run there." She frowned, and Toothless shared her expression. It was a long way back, even in a run. "Well what do you suggest?"

Toothless motioned to his saddle, and Astrid immediately sprang back.

"Oooooh no, nope, nope, I have _no _clue how to fly you. I've only been on you once!"

Toothless didn't seem to care. There was determination in his eyes, one Astrid could identify with. He just wanted to get to Hiccup, and blow past anyone who got in his way. Astrid swallowed, climbing onto the saddle.

The stirrups were fashioned for the dominant control side to be on the left, and she sighed. She didn't have a dominant curse like Hiccup didâ€|but she'd have to manage. She had no flight vest so if she fell offâ€|wellâ€|she'd just have to climb back on and try again.

"Go easy on me, okay?" She gulped. Bringing back every memory she could of watching Hiccup and Toothless practicing flying in the coveâ€"usually before going crashing in the waterâ€"she knew that there were at least six rigged positionsâ€|as to which one did what, she had no clue. But as long as she figured out what up and down were she'd be okay.

Astrid pushed her foot all the way back and looked back at the tail, it was fanned out.

"Umâ€|will that lift you?" She bit her lip. Oh, they didn't have time for this but she didn't know how to flyâ€|.

Toothless shook his head and Astrid kept moving her foot slowly up, hearing each click of the apparatus until Toothless growled and she stopped.

"This one? Okayâ€|this one." She swallowed. "Um, alright well flâ€"" Toothless's wings spread out quickly and he lifted up. Astrid let out a yelp but refused to scream. The sky before them was filled with dragonsâ€|there was no way they'd be able to manage if they got attacked by one.

Toothless growled at her again as he began to level, but was jerky in the execution, it must've been time to switch.

She jerked her foot back, looking at the tail, it went to the right and they toppled over into a tree. Toothless flapped his wings violently and Astrid shift her foot up oneâ€|they

stabilized.

"Odin's beard." Astrid sighed. "Alright, Toothless, we'll fly to the edge of the village and then we'll landâ€|there's no way we can clear the air in our condition with all those dragons in the sky."

Toothless nodded and the two flew forward. A straight fly high over the trees seemed to be the best way to go as it required no maneuvering on Astrid's part. She looked at the village and it seemed to be at its last legs of battle. But that was the worst part. Were everything was desperate and bloodier.

She swallowed, scanning the dragons for any signs of Hiccup. Hopefully they hadn't taken him somewhere outside the village or else they'd never find himâ€|

Astrid pulled back on the reigns as they reached the edge of the village. She scanned again, looking at the palace. It seemed the brunt of the battle was going on there, as the village was mostly just a post-disaster zone.

She was able to make out the King, Stoick, fighting off a ziplineback, and lodged in it's clawsâ€|was Hiccup.

"Hiccup!" She called out. "Toothless we've gottaâ€"" Toothless was already turning though it was sloppy. Astrid didn't know the position to bank left but Toothless didn't seem to care.

They surfed harshly along the currents of the wind, diving for the palace.

The wind stung Astrid's eyes as it whipped over her face, conjuring goosebumps. She couldn't see anything but a rush of what looked like ground and stone, but a red slash entered her vision, A dragon's fire blast. It brushed at Astrid's skin and she groaned as they fell to the ground, her jaw slackened as she made impact and rolled over the dirt.

Toothless ran over to her quickly, circling her and growling at anyone who came near her. He turned his nose, making sure she was okay.

She really wasn'tâ€"her whole body ached desperately and shook violentlyâ€"but she nodded nonetheless and turned behind her, the palace battle surrounding them.

"Give me back my boy!" She heard the king's voice roar, he charged at the ziplineback that had Hiccup and Astrid let out a sigh. She felt a bit confident that Stoick would be able to retrieve Hiccup.

"Warrior Alastair!" She heard a cry and looked over her shoulder to realize that everyone was charging at Toothless now, axes and swords ready. Toothless reared back, growling but not charging.

He wouldn't kill humansâ€|not anymoreâ€|.

Simply because he knew Hiccup wouldn't like it.

"Toothless!" She cried, stepping in front of him, arms spread out

protectively. "No one touch him." Astrid really didn't have any shame. Her secrets were all going to be out eventually either way.

Everyone stopped, mouths dropping.

"Hofferson." Captain Nesthair screamed. "What's the meaning of this!?"

She bit her lip, not thinking the idea through enough to know what she was going to say when asked that question.

Still, Toothless fidgeted behind her, looking over as Stoick was knocked back, blood came from his head.

"No, no, no," Astrid mumbled, ignoring the palace warriors and the captain and mounting Toothless. "Come on." She called to Toothless when she saw the zippleback that had Hiccup flying off.

She pushed her foot to the position she remembered was up, and they ascended, leveledâ€|what now?

"Give him back you slimy, over-grownâ€!" Astrid started to taunt and Toothless shot at the dragon, hitting its back with a powerful blast. Much more powerful than Toothless usually hit. The zippleback was already weak from fighting Stoick, and the impact weakened the dragon enough so that its grip slipped and Hiccup fell to the ground.

Astrid pushed desperately at the controls, shifting her foot every which way until Toothless was able to dive. Toothless gave her an over-shoulder look, signaling her to catch him when they got close enough, and she nodded.

There was no way she'd drop him.

Reaching out, she saw Hiccup's cheeks ripple at the rush of wind over his face, his eyes closed in unconsciousness.

"Prince Hiccup!" She cried out, tears falling from her eyes from the rush and the swell in her heart. Her fingers grazed the fabric of his tunic, the back bloody from the zippleback's claws. Toothless nudged his nose under Hiccup, hiking him up in the air enough for Astrid to get a proper grip and pull him to the saddle, holding him desperately while they crashed into the ground because she didn't know how to properly land.

Astrid let out gasps of air, her lungs feeling bruised and her leg completely numb, but Hiccup was in her armsâ€|safe and alive.

She looked up at the sky, the night was rolling in, but a black halo of rain began to lightly pour down. The wetness soothed her rough skin only slightly as she looked up at the tree above herâ€"their pursuit to find the zippleback taking them, ironically, right back to the cove.

In the distance, though, she heard the calls of warriors. Their show in the air surely didn't go unnoticed, and soon their place would be invaded after being kept secret all that time.

Toothless hobbled over to them, circling around them protectively, and Astrid sat up, holding Hiccup tightly, as tightly as she could for she knew he'd be ripped from her grasp soon enough.

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Hiccup felt like a million drops of fire were on his face, yet not burning him. Like dew drops of fire rained on him.

His back was bloody, but warm. His heart was pounding, yet light as air. His mind was reeling, yet oddly calm.

He felt a hand graze over his forehead, pushing his bangs back a bit and he opened his eyes, only a crack.

Rain fell down onto his lashes and peaks of the grey sky in a black night pooled through the leaves of the tree above him. And Alastair.

_Alastair!? _

Hiccup choked out the beginnings of a word, any word, but he could barely snap from his daze. Everything just looked hazy; he wasn't even sure he was awake.

"You're such a silly prince, you know that?" He heard a voice, it sounded like Alastair, but a little lighter of a tone, it was a peaceful ring and Hiccup tried to focus his eyes, but to no avail. The hands kept lightly stroking his hair, grasping his hands on his chest.

"I never signed up for all of thisâ€|to babysit you and get mixed up in a war like thisâ€|" Alastair continued talking, and Hiccup couldn't tell if he realized he could hear himâ€|there was a far away glow in his eyes as he looked out, still speaking. "But, I'm glad I met youâ€|I'm so grateful for everything you've shown me. Everythingâ€|."

Why was he talking like he was about to die? Hiccup wondered, his eyes refused to focus but his hands seemed to loosen under Alastair's grasp. Alastair was warm but Hiccup let go and reached a hand up, falling back into the reality that last time he checkedâ€|. Alastair was dead.

But here he was right beside him like always.

"Alasâ€|stairâ€|?" Hiccup mumbled, reaching up and grazing his cheek. He felt skin under his finger tips and his mouth turned up slightly into a smile. It wasn't a dreamâ€|Alastair was alive.

Butâ€|he didn't look like Alastair. This person talking to himâ€|looked almost like a goddess. Blonde hair in her eyes, and a peaceful smile and halo.

Hiccup shook his head a little as Alastair seemed stunned when he realized Hiccup was awake, but took his hand and kept it at his cheek. Hiccup felt Alastair's tears fall between his fingers.

A nose touched his ear.

"Toothless?"

":We're still here with you, we both are.:" _Toothless said gently.

":Thank you!" _Hiccup smiled and closed his eyes for a moment. It was nice, his body hurt like hell and yet he felt so calm just being surrounded by the ones he cared for the most; the ones who believed in him even though he was powerless to do anything for them. They both looked bloody, banged up. And that was all his fault. Everyone who died that day; all of it. It was his fault. Just because he existed.

Still!"

"You're; you're alive." He choked out to Alastair, his own eyes threatening to water. "I was worried that!"

Alastair pressed a finger to his lips, hushing him in a soft hum.

"I'm okay; I wouldn't leave you like that, you know that."

Hiccup tried to laugh but the rumbling hurt his chest. Alastair kept a hand over both of his, the one on his chest, and the one on his cheek. His body was warm, and Toothless' nose was cool. All the sensations left Hiccup almost lulled to sleep. He was so exhausted.

"Don't!" He started. "Don't leave me;. both of you; don't ever!"

Alastair squeezed his hand urgently as he felt Toothless's nose leave his skin.

"Prince Hiccup!" Alastair looked down, smiling at him and crying. "I'm sorry!"

"Wha?" Hiccup slurred, only to have the remainder of reality crash down on him when the calm of being beside Alastair was replaced with rougher hands. Warriors were dragging him away from Alastair, harsh yelling, and Alastair simply saying he could explain.

Explain what?

Arte was over him, pulling him up.

"Come with me, Prince Hiccup." She said softly but Hiccup yanked his arms away, falling to ground in dizziness.

Toothless was being chained down, but as much as the night fury resisted, he didn't fight back.

":Toothless! Why aren't you?"

":No more killing.:" _Toothless looked over at him, sadness in his eyes.

"Look, there's a saddle on him, Hofferson really is a traitor." He

heard the warriors say.

Whatâ€|was going on? Hiccup tried to stand but he was only pulled up again by Arte. There was a violent pulse in his back, he was losing too much blood and again he passed out.

Unable to helpâ€|again.

0o0

Hiccup wanted to wake up feeling like he did before, but instead he woke up in a comfortable bed, a change of clothes, fresh bandages wrapped around his torso, but he felt cold and alone.

He groaned, throwing his hands over his head.

"What happened!?" he grunted, trying to think back to the events of the battle.

He had been ripped off of Toothless, and apparently got released. Alastair was aliveâ€|before that he was heading to the palace after his run in with Snotloutâ€|

His eyes widened.

Snotloutâ€|_he knew. _He knew about Toothless.

Hiccup sprang up from his bed, not worrying about how light-headed he felt.

"Whoa, there Prince Hiccup." Arte came in from Alastair's room, a pile of his things in her arms.

"What are you doing with Alastair's stuff?"

"Putting it in the guard's custody."

"What!? Why? Just because he's a warrior to my father now doesn't mean you can just take his stuff!"

Arte let out a dry laugh. "That traitor, pleaseâ€|he'll be lucky if he gets the privilege of rotting in prison for the rest of his life."

Hiccup dropped his mouth. "_What!?_ Arte, tell me what's going on _right now_!"

"Alastair was seen riding a dragon during the battle, and trying to capture you."

"No-no, Alastair s_aved _me."

"That's not what everyone else saw."

There was a knock at the door. Stoick.

"Oh good, you're awake, son." Stoick entered slowly, sitting at the side of Hiccup's bed. "How are you doing son?"

Hiccup blinked, Stoick's head was wrapped in bandages as well.

"Dad, please just tell me what happened yesterday." Hiccup begged. If Alastair was caught for flying on Toothless then..wouldn't he be in trouble too? Why was Alastair getting all the blame for it? Especially since he _knew _Snotlout knew about him and Toothless specifically.

"I'm sorry I ever put you in danger by pairing you with that traitor." Stoick said darkly, but hardly answered his question.

"_Dad!_" Hiccup shouted. "_What happened!?_"

"Alastair is being tried for his crimes of being in alliance with the dragons. I don't know what his angle was for telling us about the raidâ€|but I'm sure he had something to do with this."

"Howâ€|how do you know all this?" Hiccup asked.

"We saw him on the back of a night furyâ€|trying to carry you off too."

Hiccup groaned. "No Dad heâ€"" Hiccup paused for a moment. Did his father say Alastair was being 'tried for his crimes'? "Heâ€|" Hiccup continued, but looked down, his eyes became unfocused again.

Snotlout clearly hadn't said anything yetâ€|either that or he had said something about Alastair and not him yet. Certainly he was going to wait for the perfect moment to release that bit of information.

And Alastair had risked his own good name to protect himâ€|

"What about the night fury?" Hiccup asked slowly; quietly.

"Locked up."

Hiccup almost sighed in relief, but didn't want anyone scrutinizing his reactions. "You didn't kill him?"

"No, we did a few tests on himâ€|but he's too dangerous to keep aliveâ€|we were thinking a public execution."

Hiccup gulped.

"Dad isn't that a littleâ€|much?"

"Not at all, it'll be a victory for usâ€|the only victory we could possibly get from this mess of a situation."

Hiccup looked away, tangling his hands together in a nervous guilt.

"How high is the death count?" Hiccup asked glumly.

"The worst it's ever beenâ€|we lost a third of the population, and almost all of the outer warriors are either dead or too injured to fight."

Hiccup recalled Snotlout's armâ€|

"How's Snotlout?" He asked. "I saw him..during the battleâ€|his arm, I mean."

"He's pushing through." Stoick sighed. "He's in pain but he's a fighter so he'll make it through with a tough face." Stoick pat Hiccup's shoulder gingerly. "Just like, you son."

"Pft, I didn't do anything but pass out and get captured by a zippleback." He had done nothing for Alastair and Toothless but put them in danger. What could he even do for themâ€|.? He had to think of _something. _

"When's Alastair's trial?" Hiccup thought it was fair to ask.

"Three days from now."

"And the public execution?"

"More or less tomorrowâ€|we don't want to risk him escaping, so we'll kill him while he's still weakened from battle."

Hiccup's brows knit together. He ran his tongue desperately across the backs of his teeth, making the bone feel raw.

If there was any way to save Alastair and Toothless in that kind of timeframe he had to do something simultaneous.

"I'll do it." Hiccup said, only thinking on the matter for a moment. If he thought any longer, he'd change his mind, and he couldn't risk that.

"What? Hiccup, no, you're injured andâ€""

"Andâ€|as the King-to-beâ€|I think it would be fitting that I kill this night fury. Forâ€|." He had to choose his words carefully. "â€|For the good of my people."

Stoick chewed on the proposal, not seeming convinced but looking proud at the same time.

"Alright sonâ€|you can kill the night fury."

Ba da dum next chapter's gonna be the end of part one! (Yeah that rhymed I gots the skills)

**But lots of things are going to be resolved...and new stuff will come up. What gonna happen to Hiccup, Toothless, and Astridâ€|and Snotlout (cause who doesn't wanna know what happens to him?)
**

Review Reponses:

Q-A the Authoress: haha, ah yes, what **_will **_**happen? Just gotta wait to find out.**

**Ferdoos: There's really only so many ways I can address the whole "why hasn't Hiccup figured it out thing" yetâ€|there's context clues if you squint. And I can't answer who the dragon heart itâ€|duh.

XD**

92fireDemon: Hmm..you're probably gonna hate the way I ended this chapter too XD

Rider of doom: Yeah, Astrid just dug herself further into that hole of lies. But she's got bigger issues at the moment. Oh and no problem about responding. Thank you for reviewing!

**AliceCullen13: Thank You! **

**Teen Nightfury: Wish I could say, but, alas, I cannot. You're just going to have to wait and see. **

PJfan: Haha, um|okay. Well keep those theories brewing. And of course that's why I say "no spoilers". What's the point of having chapters if I'm just gonna tell everyone what happens as they ask? That's no fun XD Oh and thank you for recommending this story to others! I'm touched :D

**Rose: Thank you so much! And yeah|I try with the grammar/spelling but I don't have a beta so it's all me and my tired eyes sometimes XD And, yeah|I'm so long winded, so this story's gonna be pretty long. Though the "big reveal" isn't

>"end of the story" stuff, so|you don't have to wait *that* long.

Guest: So many theories and things I can't say yay or nay to. And thank you, I'm glad the development is reading well for everyone|I try XD

Josy Daky: Wait no longer!

**Httydloverforever1: I'm not Lord of the Rings savvy, so I don't know what that means, haha. But either way, I couldn't say anyways. No spoilers on that one. **

Thanks for the reviews everyone! Next chapter will end part one of the story (finally) and after that, this story will be going on a bit of a hiatus|I'll get back to you on how long the hiatus will last with the next update. Probably only a month|

Either way, see you next time!

**Next chapter: Tried and Pursued **

14. Tried and Pursued

**At long last we've reached the end of part one! Not the end of the story|but just of part one. **

Thank you all for sticking with the story thus far cause, honestly, the adventure is just getting started!

Part One: We are Challenging Fate

Chapter Fourteen: Tried and Pursued

Astrid felt raw, chained, and strangely unbound all at the same

time.

She shook the wrist shackles around her and sneezed at the stuffy smell of her prison garb.

Three counts of treason: Having an illegal alliance with dangerous dragons, Capturing the Princeâ€|..and being a female that infiltrated the King's royal warriors.

Surely one of those would mean deathâ€|but all three. There was no way she was living past her trial. A tear rolled down her cheek but she tried to bit it back. How did everything go south so quicklyâ€|?

Her answer stepped before her as she found that the person approaching her cell was Snotlout. He smirked at her despite having his severed arm bandaged off. She winced as the bandaged were still stained with blood, Astrid could see the pain on the warrior duke's face, but his devious deeds gave him some kind of strength. She almost envied him

"Soâ€|did you have fun during your examination, Asrid?" Snotlout asked and Astrid with a smirk, and Astrid looked away. The examination was standard for any prisoner. They'd strip you naked and see if there was any weapons on you, or any curse by the godsâ€|What they found was that who they thought was a treacherous boy, was an even more treacherous girl.

She'd still be put to death, no doubt, but they would never kill a virginâ€|so she'd have to be mated with before they'd behead her. She gulped, looking up at Snotlout with a pleading fear in her eyes she wish she could shake, but at that point fear was all she felt.

"H-howâ€|how did you know?" Astrid asked again, her voice timid, girly. She didn't care how she sounded anymore.

Snotlout kept silent, smiling.

"_Pleaseâ€| just tell me!"

"Maybe this will sound familiarâ€|" Snotlout started. "'Please don't hate me for the path I've chosen, you'll always be my brother and I'll always love youâ€|"

Astrid's eyes widened. The carved message she had left on Atlas's memorialâ€|.

"â€|your sister Astrid Hofferson." Snotlout finished. "Honestly, leaving such a thing out in the open like that. You were practically begging to be found out."

"That memorial was in a deep part of the forestâ€|how did you even find it?"

"I saw you and that night fury together the day my cousin and uncle were awayâ€|so the next day I looked around the forest and found it. Oddly enough you and Hiccup came back that night saying there was a dragon raidâ€|"

Astrid swallowed. She knew she had a feeling of being followed.

"Found your little boyfriend with the night fury during the raidâ€|though I already suspected that he was in on it too."

"Don't you dare hurt him, Snotlout." Astrid lunged herself as close to the edge of the bars as her shackles would allow her. "Do whatever you want to me, but if you even think about touching him I'llâ€|."

"You love him, don't you?" Snotlout suddenly asked and Astrid's breath left her momentarily. Her heart skipped and she went limp. The question was unexpected and hit her harder than she would've anticipated. She really couldn't answer it. Falling for him was one thingâ€|but loveâ€|love was something else entirely. She looked up at Snotlout, teary eyed, and he just laughed.

"O-oh man, this it too good." He began to walk away, but Astrid couldn't let Snotlout reveal Hiccup as well.

"Pleaseâ€|don't say anything about Hiccupâ€|." She said softly. But Snotlout still stopped walking, turning back to her. "I know I'm going to be put to death," she continued. "I'll accept it without a fight, I'll do whatever you wantâ€|but in return you have to leave Hiccup alone."

"No deal." Snotlout shrugged.

"Please!" Astrid cried, her voice broke. "What do you hope to gain from all this?"

"The throne." Snotlout leaned close to the bars. "And for that I need your little boyfriend gone."

Astrid could hardly believe the lengths Snotlout would go to sometimes.

"He's your cousinâ€|" Astrid stressed.

"That's what I want," Snotlout said causally, before throwing her a challenging look. "Now what are you going to do about it?"

Astrid chewed her lip, thinking carefully. There was no way to save herselfâ€|she was beyond that. But Hiccupâ€|he was important, he had to find the dragon heart and stop all of this. And she had promised no matter what that she'd protect him. Her last deed might as well be doing just thatâ€|.

She only hoped that Snotlout hadn't somehow found out about them looking for the Dragon Heart.

"I'll get him to leave Berk." She said quickly. "He'll never come backâ€|justâ€|please don't say anything about him."

Snotlout looked at her quizzically.

"The throne will be all yours if Hiccup goes missing and isn't found and I'll be dead soâ€|" her lip quivered a bit at those words. "â€|So no one will go against youâ€|"

Snotlout seemed to mull over her words slowly.

"I won't even need a trialâ€|I'll just admit to all my treasonâ€|justâ€|let me speak to Hiccup as my final wish and I'll convince him to leaveâ€|."

More silence on Snotlout's part, but Astrid didn't know what else to bargain with. She didn't have too much but her own desperation.

Snotlout began to walk away again, and Astrid went up to the bars.

"_Snotlout!" _She called out desperately.

He turned back to face her, shadows molding his face.

"_Only _if Hiccup leavesâ€|but then you'll already be dead soâ€|" He laughed, leaving the sentence hanging by that thin thread.

Astrid felt her heart lurch. She crawled in the corner, bringing her knees up to her chest as she let silent tears fall from her eyes.

She was going to dieâ€|.but at least, hopefully, she could save Hiccupâ€|.

0o0

The furs on his bed were itchy against his nose as Hiccup woke up.

He felt like he had slept for an eternity, but it was only a few more hours. He got up and groaned, his body felt stiff but he tried to loosen up.

He was supposed to be killing Toothless that day, after all.

The public execution of the legendary night fury found during the raid with the treacherous warrior Alastair Hofferson. Hiccup didn't need to know that it was the buzz around the palace, and all that remained of Berk. But the issue pressing against his conscious was just how he was going to go about his plan.

Alastair was incarcerated, Toothless was up for death, and he had to fix both problems in one swoop.

He had two options. Reveal that dragons were capable of being alliesâ€|or escape. Each problem had a unique set of consequences.

If he tried to reveal the truth, there was a good chance that no one would believe himâ€|and he'd be incarcerated as well. Plus, there wasn't too much merit backing his claim now that dragons had gone and destroyed half the island. There was Toothless who was capable of change, but the other dragonsâ€|they all seemed to be operating on a different calendar. They seemed set by a prophecyâ€|one that he knew nothing about.

He went into his smithy and picked up the Dragon Heart book, flipping through the pages. He had to get the book translated, and for that he'd have to get to Trader Johannâ€|.

So maybeâ€| just maybeâ€| escaping was the better option? He could return to Berk with information that could save everyone and _then _reveal the truth about dragonsâ€| and perhaps redeem Alastair and Toothless in the process.

But how would he get both of them out without notice? And managed to track down Johann with the inevitable band of search parties all vying for their heads?

He swallowed. Nothing was working anymoreâ€|

"Prince Hiccup," he heard Arte's voice from outside.

"What is it Arte?" Hiccup groaned. "I'm busy."

She peaked in the smithy and Hiccup immediately closed the book and shoved her out of the threshold.

"I just thought you might want to know," she began. "That Alastair's trial has been canceled."

Hiccup smiled a little.

"Really?" He said excitedly. Maybe Alastair was able to pull off something? If anyone could it was definitely Alastair.

"Yeahâ€|he accepted all charges against him and agreed to being put to death tomorrow without a trial."

Hiccup's smile faded. Almost instantly he felt a dark hand run through his spin and grab the back of his neck. His head felt heavy, his stomach felt punched, and his heart ached.

"Whatâ€|?" Hiccup spoke with a bigger voice but only a squeak came out. He felt like he couldn't breathe. "Alastair's going toâ€|they're going toâ€|"

"I heard he had an extra count of treason that no one else knew aboutâ€|.but the guards aren't talking." Arte pouted, seeming more distraught over not knowing the gossip than Alastair's fate. It made Hiccup want to punch her, but he didn't have the strength to.

"But," She continued. "Alastair's last wish was apparently to see youâ€|so you can go see him any time before the execution tomorrow morning."

Hiccup barely got wind of Arte's last words before he felt his legs bolt out the door.

0o0

He didn't know what exactly carried him through the halls, as his brain was slow and his eyes were teary. But before he knew it he was at the doors of the prisons deep below the palace. Only a few authorized members were able to go there.

Hiccup was, of course, one of them, but he had never been in the prisons before. He really felt no reason to go. At least, until his friend was going to be put to death and his dying wish was to see himâ€|

He sniffled.

"Iâ€|I'm here to see my friend." Hiccup said, a sadness and an anger ringing in his tone. The guards both looked at him quizzically but didn't refuse the injured prince to enter.

Hiccup was lead to Alastair's cell, it was in the darkest part of the prison, apparently left for the prisoner's who's executions were soon. It stunk and was crawling with every bug imaginable but Hiccup paid no heed.

Alastair was the one who had to stay in there. Who had to dieâ€|.because of him.

If Alastair hadn't been assigned to him, If he had simply trained like a normal warriorâ€|he wouldn't be in this situation. He wouldn't be put to death for treason for things Hiccup should've been beheaded for.

He got to his cell, but it was so dark he could barely see him.

"Alastairâ€|" Hiccup said, leaning down on the damp floor and touched the grimy bars. "It's meâ€|"

The guard standing behind him opened the bars.

"You're allowed ten minutes." The guard told him.

"Fifteen." Hiccup corrected. The guard gave him a wry look but Hiccup simply stood and went right in the guard's face as best he could despite the height difference. "Are you going to deny the prince's orders? You'll be in here next." Hiccup threatened, and the guard tried to keep as straight face as he swallowed.

"Take as long as you need, Prince Hiccup." The guard said, and took a few steps back, giving them some illusion of privacy.

Hiccup walked in Alastair's cell, slowly. It felt like death in thereâ€|

"I heard you're going to kill Toothless todayâ€|" Alastair said. His voice was small, and it made Hiccup tear up again.

"Iâ€|I'm going to.." he looked back at the guard, but didn't trust the distance and simply scooted closer to Alastair, whispering. "I'm going to break you two out. But I had to be the one to 'kill' Toothlessâ€|you know?"

Alastair just gave a nod.

"But don't worry." Hiccup placed a hand on Alastair's shoulder. His bones and skin felt weaker, like his whole body had just given up.

"Alastair," Hiccup spoke a little more firmly, not continuing until the boy met his gaze "I'm not going to let them kill you. I'd rather

die myself before I let you be put to death because of me."

"Hiccup, you have to." Alastair said weakly.

"No, I don't, it doesn't have to be this way."

"I do."

"I don't understand." Hiccup frowned. He wanted to slap some sense into Alastair, but all those urges faded when he saw Alastair's face. Silent tears covered his cheeks, his whole face wet with both tears and a nervous sweat. He didn't know what else to do, so he just hugged him.

Alastair's body went limp against his almost instantly, sinking in to every groove of his body like he had not a bone left in him. Hiccup just patted his back, not knowing what else to do.

"I made a deal." Alastair said, his words muffled against Hiccup's shoulder.

"With who?"

"Snotlout."

"What!?" Hiccup tried to pull Alastair back but the boy didn't leave his arms. He just continued to cry in his shoulder. "What deal? What did you agree to?" Hiccup tried to get an answer.

"That's, I'd take the death penalty without a fight so he wouldn't tell anyone about you and Toothless."

Hiccup's heart began to ache again.

He felt like garbage. Alastair was going to die not only being blamed of something that was his fault, but to protect him as well. He hugged him tighter, threatening to cry himself.

"No, Alastair." His voice shattered. "Why would you do that?"

"Because you're important," Alastair said. "You have to find the one with the Dragon Heart, and Snotlout wants the throne, you have to leave."

Hiccup shook his head.

"Not without you."

"No Hiccup, don't worry about me. You and Toothless have to go, leave Berk and find the Dragon Heart. Fix this whole mess, but if you stay Snotlout will reveal you too and then there will be no one left who knows the truth."

"Why?" Hiccup cried. "Why would you?" He didn't have the heart to finish the question. He felt like he was being ungrateful. That a useless prince like him would one day have someone die willingly just to save him, he could only thank Alastair. But he wouldn't bring

himself to do that sinceâ€"he hugged Alastair even tighterâ€"since Alastair was going to die because of himâ€|

He felt Alastair's body leave his, the limp flesh in his arms seemed to gain only a bit a strength as Alastair looked at him. His face wet, hair pulled from his shining eyes. Hiccup never saw him with such clarity before. He was sad that only at death's door was Alastair so emotionally threadbare.

"I won't let them kill youâ€|. " Hiccup said again, miserably. But Alastair leaned forward, cupping his cheek.

"Just live for meâ€|" Alastair said timidly before Hiccup lost all train of thought completely when Alastair leaned forward and kissed him.

His mind was blank, his hands fell to the floor and his eyes stayed wide open.

He was being kissedâ€|by Alastairâ€|.

But he didn't pull away. Every cell in his brain was telling him to shove this guy away and run off. But how could he in the situation they were in? So he just stayed there, in shock, looking down at Alastair.

He lookedâ€|pretty. Just like he did when he woke up during the raid. He felt stupid just then. He knew what was happening, but why wouldn't his brain let him make that conclusion? Toothless had told him, and there was surely enough evidence butâ€|stillâ€|he couldn't believe it.

There was a tear that shined as it fell from Alastair's lashes and Hiccup reached up and whipped it away. And at that Alastair pulled away.

The boy bit his lip, still crying, but didn't provide any other word but that.

Hiccup stood. Whipping his mouth with the back of his hand and got to the threshold of the cell before he turned and said one final thing.

"I'll be back for you." Was all he said, dryly, before he walked back down the hall.

The execution of Toothless was at hand nowâ€|

0o0

Hiccup wore the same garb he had when he dueled Snotlout, hoping it would bring him luck towards what he was about to do.

There was no hope in trying to reason that that point. All he was focused on was getting Toothless and Alastair out of Berk with himâ€|

And from there, they'd figure everything else out.

"This is a defining moment in your life, son." Stoick said, beaming

proudly. "Your first kill."

"I knowâ€|" Hiccup said, his voice was monotone, his mind in three million places at once. His head was spinning and his chest hurt, but determination was the thing that pumped his veins almost to the point of bursting. He could do thisâ€|but only if he left every other tie out of his mind. Every tie except his bond to Toothlessâ€|.

He swallowed.

And Alastairâ€|

He looked up at Stoick, his eyes were blank towards his own kin. He loved his father, he loved his peopleâ€|he wanted to be heir and to lead the Vikings to a new era in their existence. But there was too much that prevented such a progress to happen at that point.

After this encounter, he'd be goneâ€|so he looked up at his father, and hugged him.

Stoick took a step back, shocked, but Hiccup just clung, not letting go even with the movement.

"Son, what 'sâ€"?"

"I love you, dad." Hiccup muffled into Stoick's tunic.

"Sonâ€| "

Hiccup pulled back, giving Stoick a watery smile.

"Andâ€| I'm sorryâ€|if I didn't become the son you wanted me to beâ€|" Hiccup choked out.

Stoick's face only painted confusion, and Hiccup felt bad for being so cryptic, but he turned his back to his father then and walked away.

At the entrance of the ring he saw Snotlout there in the sun's blow of light. Everything was in shadows, but Hiccup knew the smirk that was on his face.

"I'm interested to see what you'll doâ€|_cousin_." Snotlout said.

Hiccup kept walking, but stopped right in the sun's blow, his back to Snotlout.

"I spoke to Alastair."

"Ah, your girlfriend."

The comment hit Hiccup harder than usual. His heart flipped and he touched his lips before his fingers curled into a fist.

"The throne is yours." Hiccup said, his voice strained. "I have a world to save."

Snotlout let out a laugh, his chest rumbling.

"Oh really?"

Hiccup just nodded, and put on his helmet. He walked out into the ring, the sun fully on him. A spotlight to perfectly illuminate his treachery.

He closed his eyes. He was close enough to Toothless nowâ€|he could use their link.

_:::Toothlessâ€|can you hear me?::: _Hiccup asked, desperate.

_:::I'm hereâ€|::: _Toothless answered and Hiccup sighed with relief, a uncontrolled smile crossing his lips.

:::Just play along, alright? We're busting out of here.:::

He could feel Toothless's shock.

_:::I don't have time to explain.::: _Hiccup said, readying his dagger, trying to look convincing. _:::Just be ready to fly off, alright?:::_

_:::I trust youâ€|::: _Toothless simply said. The replyâ€"without a single second of hesitationâ€"warmed Hiccup's heart. It gave him strength even as he stood in the kill ring.

It amazed him how the Vikings could have an execution right after the raid. Hiccup felt like he was standing in a graveyard after how many dead bodies he knew were in there just a little while ago. The chains of the roof were fixed, the blood stained cleaned as best as possible. But the spiritsâ€|they remained and haunted his mind.

Still, he gripped his dagger.

"I'm ready!" Hiccup called out, and he heard the gates open.

_:::Let's make this convincingâ€|::: _He said to Toothless and the night fury jumped out from the gates, clawing and roaring around the ring, looking wild and deranged. Everyone stepped back.

Everyone except Hiccup.

He walked forward slowly to Toothless, dropping his mother's dagger and leaving it on the ground. He took off his helmet as well, leaving it behind.

He could hear the crowd's whispers and words of confusion, and he took one last look around. A Snotloutâ€"smirkingâ€"and at his fatherâ€"confused. His gaze lingered on Stoick and he frowned, pleading in his eyes for him to be forgiven one day.

Hiccup was fortunate to see that Toothless was still saddled. No one could probably figure out how to remove it. And he climbed on.

Everyone gasped.

"Prince Hiccup!" He heard voices call out.

"He's a traitor as wellâ€|.!"

Hiccup tried to close out the world, but their words still echoed in his mind.

He had gotten what he needed. They released Toothless, thinking their prince was going to kill him. But instead Toothless blasted to the chains of the roof, leaving an opening for them to escape.

0o0

Hiccup knew he should've been happy that execution had worked almost seamlessly, and rather quickly.

They landed in the forest, hiding on the other side and as far away from the cove as they could. They could already see the torches of the search parties, but they had to lay low until the night. Then, they'd fly to the palace, get Alastair, and get out.

Hiccup sighed and he and Toothless hid in a thicket of trees. He flopped against the warmth of his dragon, the events of the day hardly physically exhausting, but his heart was tired. His brain was tired.

Toothless nudged him affectionately, giving a little moan of his own.

::I'm sorry you were trapped in there, Toothless. Hiccup apologized. _::All of thisâ€|it's my faultâ€|:_

::We're all to blame in some ways. Toothless said, but Hiccup could tell the night fury was shaken by the day's events as well. Just as shaken as Alastair was when he went to visit him. Hiccup turned and hugged Toothless, just wanting to feel close.

He had to feel close to _someone, _the number of people he had left in this world that he could trust was dwindling.

He stayed like that for a while, his thoughts racing. And he could feel Toothless reading every one of them, it was odd, like he was a book and someone was quickly reading all of his pages. But it was Toothlessâ€|so he didn't mind.

The night fury did stop, though, on one particular moment. The moment Hiccup _knew _Toothless would ask about. The moment Hiccup _didn't _want to talk about.

::Don't askâ€|: Hiccup said.

::Are you going to accept her now?:: _Toothless asked anyway.

::Alastair isâ€|:: Hiccup started but buried his face into Toothless, feeling like a little child. _::I can'tâ€|::_ Hiccup said stubbornly. _::Why would Alastair lie to me for so longâ€|whyâ€|?::_

-

::That's a question you have to ask her.::

_::I can't believe itâ€|:: _Hiccup said. He knew how stupid he was being. But he almost didn't care. He couldn't start this journey, start this new life feeling bitter towards Alastair for lying.

His little worldâ€|it was much better than the world he lived in now. He didn't want a world where the two people he was leaving all his trust in were lying to himâ€|

He looked up at Toothless miserably. The dragon was keeping things from him as wellâ€|

But Alastair hadâ€|_kissed _him.

In the end he was just surrounded by secrets and lies. But those two were all he had leftâ€|

_::I need to hear it from Alastair firstâ€|before Iâ€|before I canâ€|:: _Hiccup didn't know what. So he just let the sentence linger. He could feel Toothless's frustration, but ignored it.

_::So what now?:: _Toothless asked.

::We go get Alastairâ€|::

_::No, after that. You seem to want some book translated.:: _

::The book we found on Nidhoggâ€|I know someone who can translate it. It's a good first step to finding the Dragon Heartâ€|::

Hiccup felt Toothless tense up against him. The thought of the dragon heart left Toothless's mind turbulent, and all of the odd fears Hiccup got from him before came back.

Hiccup hugged Toothless tighter.

_::No one's going to kill anyone, Toothless.:: _He assured him.

::We're going to stop all of this, we just have to find her andâ€|:: Hiccup pulled back for a moment, though. A thought entering his mind.

He remembered Old Wrinkly's words. To take the Toothless and a girl and leave Berk.

He was beginning to understand that more nowâ€|how he was warned that there was no reasoning with anyone at this point. Old Wrinkly was rightâ€|as usual. But the realization stung Hiccup that he was right about everything.

Hiccup was, essentially, taking Toothless and a girlâ€|and leaving Berk.

But did that mean Alastair wasâ€|?

_::Toothless, do you feel any weird energy from Alastair when she'sâ€|?:: _He swallowed. Not knowing if he really wanted to go thereâ€|once he started calling Alastair a she there was no going backâ€|

_::I do not.:: _Toothless answered simply. _::Just a strong sense of protection towards you.::_

Hiccup bit his lipâ€|. .

_::Then I guess we have to keep searchingâ€|:: _He looked up at the sun, it was beginning to set and he got up, sighing. _::Come onâ€|we have to go get Alastair. I don't trust that they'll wait until morning.:: _Toothless nodded and stood as well as Hiccup mounted him. As soon as the tip of the sky flooded with darkness they took off, soaring in the night's blanket to the palace.

Their last fly to the palace.

0o0

There was a lone tree in the back of the palace, near the laundry hangers and the supply shed. The branches were wide and the leaves were many.

It was big enough for Toothless to hide in for only thirty minutes, for after that the moon would shine through the leaves and a night fury would be perfectly visible.

Hiccup swallowed as he walked quietly around back. He had thirty minutesâ€|only thirtyâ€|his last time in the only home he'd known his whole life.

He entered through the back door. The same back door he had always used when he was younger to sneak out to 'prove himself'.

That seemed like an eternity ago. So juvenile and simple. He almost longed for those days where he wistfully lived for the thrill of one day being accepted than what he was doing then. Escaping with a dragon and saving his treacherous friend from death.

The was a back hallway that lead to the prison. It was usually the path the guards took the prisoners through so that their presence wouldn't disturb the palace. But Hiccup took it quietly. Groping his way through because he was too afraid to light a torch.

It had been at least three hours since Hiccup and Toothless had escaped the ring, so he knew the palace knew about it. He only hopped all the guards were out looking for him and not at the doorsâ€|.

His thought trailed, though, when he got to the doors and two guards were there. Hiccup didn't know why he thought they'd leave the prison unguarded even with the prince and a night fury loose.

"The King figured you'd come hereâ€|" One of the guards said.

Hiccup glowered and reached for his dagger, only to remember that he left it in the ring. He almost slapped himself for running in there unarmed.

The guards walked towards him and grabbed hold of his wrist, dragging him up.

"You've caused enough trouble, your father wants you in the throne

room before your trial."

"No! I have to!" Hiccup started, but he looked down, seeing the keys on the guards belt. Those must've been the keys to the cells. But he had to get it first.

Hiccup's brain was one-track at that point and when he grabbed for the keys he felt the guard's sword under his fingers instead.

"You don't have to do anything." The guard said. "We're going to kill your friend, and you better hope that you're not next for the treason you've!"

And at that Hiccup _knew _all thought had left him. For he grabbed the sword roughly and pulled it from its sheath, ramming it into the stomach of the guard. They both fell to the ground and Hiccup slashed the ankles of the other guard, grabbing the keeps and running off.

His blood boiled, his heart raced, and his mind was kicking him. Hiccup had one objective, get Alastair and get out.

But he didn't realize he was so far gone that he'd _kill _to do so.

Maybe the guards weren't dead? Maybe someone would find them before they lost too much blood? Snotlout survived a severed arm after all. Still he ran, all the prisoners looked at him as he ran like a mad man. His face had dots of blood on it, and his sword dripped a trail behind him.

"Alastair!" Hiccup called out and when he got to the cell he jostled all the keys inside in a frantic panic until, thankfully, one of the keys opened it.

He rushed inside diving onto his knees and hugging Alastair tightly.

She was cold, like she was trying to just died right there. Had she really not trusted he'd come for her?

Hiccup swallowed again. _She. _There really was no going back!

He pulled away, shaking Alastair desperately.

"Come on, Alastair."

"H-Hiccup why?"

"_Come on._" He pleaded with her, pulling at her arm. "We don't have time, we have to _go_."

He was able to drag Alastair out, her legs were like jelly as he pulled her but at least she was moving.

"Toothless is waiting outside." Hiccup said.

"What?" Alastair said. "Hiccup what's going on, what did you?"

They passed the entrance to the prison, the guards still left on the ground. Alastair gasped and Hiccup bit his lip. He couldn't deal with the guiltâ€|not yetâ€|he had to get out _firstâ€|

He held onto Alastair's hand desperately.

"We're going to fly off on Toothless and go find Trader Johann to translateâ€| "

Hiccup stopped dead in the tracks.

The book.

He slapped his hand on his forehead. Oh, how could he have been so stupid?

He left the Dragon Heart book in his smithyâ€|_in his room_. That was clear on the other side of the palace, and there weren't enough hidden hallways that he wouldn't be noticed. And with Alastair in towâ€|

He sank to the ground, groaning.

"Why am I so worthless, I can't do _anything right_!?" Hiccup growled to himself.

"Prince Hiccupâ€|" Alastair started.

"Don't call me prince." Hiccup cried. "I'm not a princeâ€|I'm a traitor. I'm the enemy. My own father wants to put me on trial nowâ€|it's allâ€| "

"Over." Hiccup heard someone finish his sentence, but it wasn't Alastair. He looked up and saw Snotlout standing before them, a sword in hand.

He growled, that was the last thing he needed, for sure.

Alastair stepped in front of him. She wasn't armed either but Hiccup smiled, knowing she'd take a sword right to her chest if it meant protecting him. But he wasn't going to put Alastair through anything else that day.

He stood, taking the bloodstained sword and stepping in front of Alastair.

"Let me handle this." He told Alastair and went up to Snotlout.

"It ends right here, Snotlout, you and me."

"I'll kill you both," Snotlout smiled, speaking boldly for someone who was holding a sword in his only hand left. Still, Hiccup knew that even with one arm, Snotlout could probably still defeat him. "And I'll be a hero for it."

"I'm sure you willâ€|" Hiccup replied. "For nowâ€| "

And with that they lunged at each other.

Hiccup still wasn't too skilled with a sword. He tried to channel the

things Alastair had told him what seemed like forever ago, but the only thing that was fueling his arms as they swung was his rage. He wanted to kill his cousin, and this time, sadly, he knew once he got the chance he'd do it.

"Why?" Hiccup said as their swords locked. "Why do you hate me so much, Snotlout? We're family."

"I'm not family to some weakling like you." Snotlout said. His form was sloppy with only one arm, but it was his sloppiness that was the most dangerous element. His sword could slip and slice Hiccup at any moment.

"Snotlout please just!" Hiccup pleaded, but didn't know what exactly he wanted. The rage to kill and the need to reconcile were at war in him, but the rage was winning.

Their blades locked again.

"Do you have idea what it's like to be second to someone like you?" Snotlout hissed. "To be better than you in every way but still lose." Snotlout jumped back, looking down at the ground. His fists shook and the fight ceased.

"I was supposed to be the heir, but then you were bornâ€œit was embarrassing, to be put behind a stupid baby who barely lived the first couple of weeks after birth because you were so weak."

Hiccup's eyes widened.

"I want you deadâ€œ" Snotlout whispered.

"Snotloutâ€œ" Hiccup said quietly, dropped his sword and felt his eyes stinging again. He walked up to his cousin, reaching forward and placing a hand on his shoulder. It was odd, feeling his skin under his palm. They never touched. Never hugged, never smiled at each other like relatives were supposed to. They only hated each other, envied each other for the same reasons but on different sides of the spectrum. It was the worst kind of irony.

But it wasn't enough. Hiccup saw the fire reignite behind Snotlout's eyes, and he smiled the devil's smile as he lunged his hand up, sword swinging right for Hiccup's neck.

Hiccup closed his eyes, expecting the blow as he heard Alastair cry out after him, but seconds later he didn't feel the sting of a blade slicing his skin but a heavy body falling against him.

Snotlout was passed out, falling into him and they both tumbled in the ground.

Hiccup looked up, confused, but saw Gothi standing there. He hand was, thumb poking out.

He had heard of those techniques from spiritual elders. How they could stop flows of energy within the body momentarily just by pressing on a certain spot of the body. Hiccup swallowed, and rolled Snotlout over gently.

"He'll wake up soon." Alastair pulled at Hiccup. "We have to go."

Hiccup stood and looked at Gothi; she was holding something in her other hand.

The Dragon Heart book.

Hiccup smiled as Gothi handed it to him and she tapped the side of the wall, a side door opening that lead to a tunnel. She gestured towards it.

"She wants us to go down there?" Alastair raised a brow. "What if it's a trap?"

Hiccup had thought that as well, but then he looked down at the book. Gothi was like Old Wrinkly. She must've known the truth as well.

"No, I don't think so!" Hiccup said, and he took Alastair's hand, squeezing it. "She's helping us. I'm sure this tunnel leads to outside where Toothless is." He faced Gothi. "Right?"

The old woman only nodded. And shoved them inside before she closed the door behind them.

0o0

Hiccup and Alastair walked down the tunnel for a good ten minutes. They had a few minutes left to spare before the half hour was up, but Hiccup knew that no one was probably out back since he was sure word had gotten out that he was roaming through the palace.

Still, he kept Alastair's hand in his, pulling her with urgency.

In the few moments of quiet his mind raced again, the thoughts of the journey ahead, of possibly killing the guards, Snotlout's words; Alastair's kiss. He stopped point-blank at that thought and turned to face her, getting a good look at her with his new clarity.

It made him feel sick and relieved at the same time. Relieved that he knew the truth, but sick that she had lied to him. Was still lying to him.

He needed to hear it from her.

"Alastair!" he started.

"Why'd you stop? We have to!"

"Don't lie to me!" He said, still as cryptic as ever. He couldn't bring himself to say it in full, hoping that she'd get it and fess up. He saw the comprehension glitter in her eyes. Her blue eyes; they were beautiful now that he knew!

"I!" Alastair started, but Hiccup stepped towards her, grabbing her shoulders roughly.

"_Don't lie to me_." He stressed harder, shaking her a bit. And she

looked down, being stubborn, before hugging him tightly.

"Don't leave me!" she said instead, whispering the words to him even though they were alone. Hiccup simply pulled her away, still grasping her shoulders and looked her deeply in the eye. He saw the fear in them. Did telling him scare her that much?

He couldn't press any further than that as he remembered the larger things at hand. Hiccup slid his hand down, grabbing her hand yet again and they continued running. The end of the tunnel was a staircase that lead upwards, and the hatch that opened at the top was a small hole in the supply shed, right near the tree.

"Where's Toothless?" Alastair asked. And as soon as she did the moon's shine blanketed the leaves on the tree, silhouetting a black figure.

Toothless.

::We're back.:: Hiccup said. ::Glad to see that you're safe::

0o0

The night was cool, and Hiccup was thankful since he hadn't been able to remake the new flying vests in time. Alastair held on to him tightly, and he clutched the reigns but he knew that as long as they didn't run into trouble, there was no risk of falling off.

He trusted Toothless after all.

Berk was far behind them at that point, as they had been flying for hours, all night. No one spotted them, thank Thor, but the emotional weight of leaving everything behind so quickly with nothing but the clothes on their backs and the Dragon Heart book it was disconcerting.

This wasn't how he pictured anything to end.

"I'm sorry I got you both into all of this!" Hiccup said, not even trying to hide his silent crying. "I'm so sorry!"

He felt Alastair hug him tighter.

"I think it was just fate!" She looked back. "You weren't meant to be there, it was only hindering you."

"And you?" Hiccup asked.

There was a silence between them before Alastair answered. Her hands clutching into his sides roughly.

"I told you!" She said timidly. "My duty is to you now! my only loyalty is to you!"

::That goes for two of us.:: Toothless agreed.

::We're not going to leave you, we're your friends! so we'll all face whatever lies ahead together.::

Hiccup smiled. A raise of warmth going through him slowly and it soothed his bones.

The air was a bit chilled that night, but between the warmth of Toothless and Alastair's arms around him he felt a bit at peace.

Even if it was only for a moment.

And even though the sky ahead burned with a sun raise that illuminated the most unclear future he had ever faced.

Aaaaaaaaaand, cue the end of part one!

**Whew, well that was a bumpy ride. **

Is everything finished? Nope, clearly not. Everything's just getting started cause now that our heroes aren't on Berk anymore they've got a lot of ground to cover. The world's a pretty big place. And the Dragon Heart is out there somewhere!

**So, yeah, there's going to be another hiatus not that Part 1 is finished because I've decided to use winter break to completely focus on another personal project that requires a lot of attention.
**

So, VikingPunk Tale will return with part 2 on the 15**th**** of January.**

I know that sucks but I need a break X_X

Review Responses:

Q-A the Authoress: Well a lot of stuff surely happens in this chapter as well, as far as conclusions go, I rather enjoyed it. Hope you did too!

**Wolffury: Well at least I got that surprise factor XD and cool! Glad you got an account, this site is pretty cool.
**

Hpnarutardsjedipirate1234: Well it's here now!

**92firedemon: I know, I'm sorry, but I've got a lot of personal projects that piled up before of school. So I have to make time for other things now that I have a month off. **

AliceCullen3: Thanks :)

**Rose: Sorry this chapter was late, I had school stuff with finals and whatnot. But yes, the "hiccup" is going to be pretty interesting in part 2. But he still doesn't know her real name haha. **

**Storspeaker: Hopefully this chapter was to your liking, but I'm glad I'll no longer get people telling me how stupid Hiccup is now XD He suspected something along the lines of Alastair being a girl a while ago, but just couldn't bring himself to face that someone he was very close to and who he trusted was also just being fake.

**

Guest1: Hiccup's secret got revealed, though not the way everyone thought. He kind let his cat out of the bag himself. And how he flies off as a fugitive!

**Guest2: Thank you! I'm glad you liked how it played out. I was going for a bit of something different and having Astrid be the one who was busted first. **

**Wishyouweremedontya: Thank you, and I'm updating more frequently than I used to, believe me, but my life is super busy so this is about as frequent as I can get at the moment. And this was only one of Astrid's revelations. There's a much bigger one coming up later in the story. **

**Elcall: Snotlout's sneaky and paranoid so he followed her XD I tried to hint at that without being too obvious in the previous chapters. **

**Ferdoos: You guessed correct! Though that was kinda obvious at this point. **

PJfan449: Ding ding ding, you're correct! I think you're the only one who caught that before this chapter XD

**Guest3: Oh yeah, he was determined to find out what was up with Hiccup and Alastair. And if you liked the hiccupstrid moment last chapter I'm sure loved the stuff in this one. Their relationship is very odd right now, but stuff will get a little more ironed out in the next part. Hiccup was suspicious of Alastair being a girl a while ago, but didn't want to deal with someone he trusted also lying to him, he still doesn't really want to deal with it, but after that kiss he couldn't really ignore it anymore. And, I can't say who the dragon heart is, duh. **

**Rider of doom: Thank you! And it's okay!???

**SAmaster01: Oh that's always nice to come back to stories and see a few more chapters updated XD. And, well, I don't know if the "status quo" you speak of has been restored but no one died. Everyone's fine just emotionally exhausted. And I'm glad the fantasy-epic part of it is shining through even this early in the story. This first part was really just a lot of set up to get them off Berk with a mission, and now that that's completed a new journey is going to unfold. They're all going to get sucked into a lot of crap. And as for the Alastair/Astrid dilemma, how that was going to pan out has been planned out for a while. So, yeah, I knew what I was doing. I wanted their "relationship" to be pretty odd. So now we have the odd circumstance of Hiccup knowing the truth but not wanting to deal with it, Astrid being too scared to say anything even though she knows he's probably figured it out, and then there's that awkward kiss to deal with. It's fun to put those two in these kind of odd predicaments instead of just having it pan out the old fashion way. Cause where's the fun in that? But the dynamic will certainly change with all of this new information being revealed. **

Josy daky: Thank you!

**Love this Story: Thank you, I'm glad you like it. Sorry the update

was late butâ€|you knowâ€|schoolâ€|**

**Useyourimagination: Haha yeah, a lot of people like this story for doing something different with those two. It's fun to deal with Astrid falling for Hiccup first instead of the other way around like it is in canon. And Part 2 will be updated in the same story. I don't spilt stories I just write everything in one. So when part 2 comes along this same story will update. **

Me myself and I: Sorry, I was busy with my last week of the semester, finals and whatnot. But the chapter's here now so rejoice!

Thanks for the **_tons **_**of review for part one everybody! But the story will be back next month with tons of new drama, characters, and all the other juicy stuff you all love. So, have a good break!**

See you on January 15**th****!**

15. Orphaned and Wandering

**Alrighty we're back to business! **

Not gonna bog you down with details, I had a productive winter breakâ€"though maybe a little too productive cause the release date for this chapter completely slipped my mind. And then school happened and now it's super late buuuuuuuuut this story is back, and Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid are starting a new journeyâ€|

Woo!

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter Fifteen: Orphaned and Wandering

Hiccup would never forget the first time he flew on Toothless.

It was the jarring kind of excitement that would be engraved within him for lifetimes. But never did he think something he had practically fallen in love with would make him so sick after three days of nothing but non-stop flying.

After leaving Berk Hiccup knew that there would be a lot of flying ahead of them. The first day he seemed to be on a runner's high. Not wanting to rest and only wanting to cross as much ocean as possible in hopes that perhaps Trader Johann was pulling into a Viking port.

The next day, he was neutral. His mind was blank, his goal was clear, but his motivation was fading. It was a motionless experience, but still okay.

The third day was the bad day.

They had all been staying on abandoned, small islands during the afternoons. It was an awkward sleep schedule, but they didn't want to risk being caught if it turned out people were following them still. Toothless was a night fury, after all, so traveling at night seemed

wiser in hopes of staying hidden and not running into rogue dragons.

But Hiccup remembered that afternoon while Alastair was taking her shift in making sure there were no search parties or dragons coming at them that his mind raced.

Everything about the past few days came barreling into his mind, bursting his brain at the seams and making his ears pop from the pressure. His sudden leave, the fact that he was probably now being called a traitor, his ongoing search for the dragon heart, his last fight with Snotlout, all the ones left for dead on Berk because of a dragon attack caused by him, how he had probably killed two people in desperation, Alastair's genderâ€|Alastair's kissâ€|.

It was all too much, he concluded, and that day they got no flying done. Only trying to wake Hiccup up.

His mind wouldn't allow him to wake up until he sorted out every ounce of bad blood he had stirring around.

His goal to find Trader Johann to translate the book and find the dragon heart was clear. He knew that if he wanted to find out what all the confusion was, what all the madness and bad occurrences brewing was that he had to do soâ€|even if it meant leaving behind his kingdom, his throne, and his finally acquired "good" name on Berk.

He feared, though, that he wouldn't be able to go back. That after he did his duty, found the dragon heart and fulfilled whatever he had toâ€|would his kingdom cheer his return as a heroâ€|or simply point their swords at the returning traitor?

He knew, though, that no matter what, he could kiss his right to the throne goodbye. He had made that choice by leaving, and he knew that. Snotlout would take it, no doubt, and despite Alastair strongly disagreeingâ€|the Vikings would probably be better off with Snotlout as their king than Hiccup. Maybe his calling really was grander than Berkâ€|? And he simply wasn't meant to be King? Fate seemed to have a way of telling him that every chance it got, that even when he was starting to get the approval of his people, he still had to give it all up and become a disappointment.

He even dragged his best friends into itâ€|

Hiccup, sighed, though, at the secrets that still lingered between all of them. But his goals were still very clear.

Trust was something he simply had to earn from Toothlessâ€|but he was beginning to wonder what else he had to do to earn it. He had almost all of it, he could feel it, but there was more, much more, that Toothless wasn't saying. Or perhaps something he was afraid to askâ€|all the more, the only reason Hiccup could gather from his connection to Toothless was that the night fury was scaredâ€|and knowing that it made Toothless afraid, scared him as well.

And thenâ€|there was Alastair.

He didn't even know where to beginâ€|but there was definitely a clear goal thereâ€|. find out why she had been lying to him. Find out

why she snuck into the army as a girl. And if she really did have some kind of connection to the dragon heart.

And he'd do it _soon._

_:::No wonder you're at restâ€|::: _Hiccup heard Toothless enter his mind. _:::Your mind is a raging storm.::_

_:::T-Toothless? Have you been here the whole time?::: _Hiccup wouldn't be shocked if he had been. The dragon's presence lingered in Hiccup's mind like a pulling voice right at the end of a stressful dream. His mind was being pulled back into reality.

_:::No, I couldn't get in for the longest time,::: _Toothless replied._ :::But your mind has seemed to come to a peace so I can finally see if you're alrightâ€|.we were worried.::_

:::Oh..sorry. I guess I have been out for a long time, huh?:

:::Almost all dayâ€|:

There was a silence between them and Hiccup still wondered how much Toothless had heardâ€|.

:::I'm glad you're coming to terms with some things.::

:::I don't know if I'd jump to "coming to terms"â€|I guess I can just deal with it all a little better.::

_:::Why didn't you talk to me about all of this, why did you let your mind get so bogged down?::: _Toothless asked, exerting a weird mix of worry and offense. _:::We were flying for two days and you simply kept your mind closed off.::_

Hiccup paused in thought. _He _actually shut Toothless out this time? Was that all it tookâ€|being so confused and full of unhandled thoughts that there was no room for anyone else to read them?

If that was it than Toothless felt that way every time Hiccup couldn't get inâ€|.though he did recall Toothless mentioning that the dragon simply had more control than he didâ€|so maybe that wasn't the caseâ€|.?

_:::You're over thinking it.::: _He could feel Toothless's smirk.
:::That's your problem.::

:::So then teach me how to control it betterâ€|!:

:::It's not something I can teach, your mind is your mind, I can only do but so much.::

_:::Toothlessâ€|::: _Hiccup whined, but he felt a nudge at his arm.

:::Open your eyes now and wake upâ€|the girl is getting worried.::

There was another spike in Hiccup's mood at Alastair's mention but he sighed and willed his body to move regardless.

The third day was definitely a day for thinkingâ€|for simmering down his quaking mind, overripe and full to burst. But digging up all of his past mistakes, his experiences, his future goalsâ€|it only made him angry. Angry that _this _was his destinyâ€|and not what he had wantedâ€|.

OoO

Astrid wasn't too thrilled that they had wasted a whole day trying to get Hiccup to wake upâ€|and now it was too bright to flyâ€|

But, then again, she wasn't really all that mad either. After two hours of trying to get him awakeâ€"and confirming that he _was _just sleeping and not deadâ€"her and Toothless stayed in their own thoughts. Toothless stayed near Hiccup, taking up the task of being there when he woke up. Toothless didn't seem too worriedâ€|in fact, he seemed to heavily concentrate on Hiccup as he slept, almost like he was reading a book.

Astrid was at the very least, thankful for a slow dayâ€|even if she was still on watch for followers or wild dragonsâ€|she could simply let her mind catch up with her body.

Her mind was still back on Berk, in that prison cell, desperate and mentally preparing herself for death. It was even scarier because she _was _still aliveâ€|and after she had spent so much time convincing herself it was all going to be over. To take every last action and make it count. But now she had to live with those rash decisions.

Like the one to kiss Hiccup.

She looked back at the boy and the dragon before sighing and looking back at the cliffs ahead. It was a stupid choice, to say the least, she didn't even know the other half of why she did it. Sure, she cared for Hiccupâ€|admired his determination in all the confusion of what was going onâ€|and of course she knew that anything extra she felt was simply because she _was _falling for him. But she simply wasn't ready to deal with it yet. To deal with the consequences of what she had done. Either Hiccup thought she was the strangest boy he had ever met or that he knew she was a girl. Astrid was just too afraid to ask.

A stubborn part of her simply wanted the hype and the adrenaline to fade, and for her to be "Alastair, the Prince's babysitter" again. But that journey was over, and the one ahead was scarier because it was so unknown. Everything was uncertain including the nature of their relationship.

And what was she going to do once their journey continued? Stay by Hiccup's side while he found the dragon heart girl and went and saved whatever he had to save with herâ€|? And what would become of them, Astrid wondered. Would her job of protecting Hiccup be done? Because why would he choose to travel with someone who had been lying to his face their whole friendship?

Toothless let out a grumble and Astrid looked over her shoulder again. Hiccup was moving.

She immediately jumped up and went over to the night fury.

"Is he finally waking up?" She asked and Toothless kept nudging at the boy before Hiccup finally opened his eyes.

"Hey, umâ€œ!" Hiccup started before smiling sheepishly. "Sorry about that."

Astrid could almost laugh at how casual he sounded. Though he seemed completely aware of his passing outâ€œ|so she figured he was perhaps talking to Toothless before he woke up. Ifâ€œ|they even did that.

Once things were clearer she'd have to ask him how exactly his and Toothless's relationship worked in terms of mind reading.

"You had me and Toothless worried." She slapped his shoulder. "You're such aâ€œ!" But she stopped. She felt as if she was acting too familiarâ€œ|too much like there wasn't something big and obvious lingering between themâ€œ|and she stopped, pulling her fist back and hunching over.

"Weâ€œ|should get flyingâ€œ!" Hiccup said slowly.

"It's day now, I thought you said we shouldn't fly then."

Hiccup bit his lip. "We need to get out of Viking occupied territory as quickly as possibleâ€œ|I don't think it will hurt if we at least fly to another island."

Astrid didn't agreeâ€œ|but she didn't feel like arguing either. Hiccup was worried that someone would come after them, but to be honest, Astrid knew that no one was looking for them. They really didn't have to rush so muchâ€œ|but then maybe she just wanted to prolong the confused and helpless state as long as she could before she had to fess up to the past.

Still Hiccup had his mind made up.

"We'll leave as soon as we catch some fish." Hiccup said.

0o0

The inland lake of the island was simply just ocean run off, but it meant good fish. Even though they couldn't catch all but so much with the risk of it spoiling, it meant that everyone could have a little more fish, which Astrid was thankful for since Toothless took a large amount of it.

But he _was _the one doing all the flying after all.

She saw Hiccup and Toothless 'talking' as they fished and Astrid just stayed out of the way, watching the two communicate as she had back in the cove. She almost missed that timeâ€œ|everything seemed so simple. The goals and the looming unknown were still there, just as it always had been, but being tucked away in the cove and watching the Viking Prince and a night fury learn to fly was almost as relaxing as it was magnificent compared to watching a traitor prince and traitor night fury catch their only means of food as they run further and further away.

It was after staring at them for a while when Astrid realized something all at once, and looked down at her own self to confirm it.

They all had on the same clothes as when they left.

"Hiccup!" She called out.

"Yeah Alastair?"

"Are we planning on washing our clothes any time soon?" She smelled herself. "Especially meâ€|" She smelled like the prison cell with three days of nervous sweat piled on.

She saw Hiccup chew on the thought, but when Toothless leaned over and sniffed him, only to rear back and grumble. Hiccup sighed.

"I guess we could do it hereâ€|.but in salt water? Isn't there something against that?"

Astrid hopped down from the rock she was sitting on. "It'll have to do." She walked over to him, holding out her hand, Hiccup looked at it quizzically before raising a brow to her. "Give me your clothes." She tried to sound business about it but when she saw Hiccup blush she couldn't help but blush too.

Toothless snorted between them before biting at Hiccup's tunicâ€"carefully missing his still wrapped back woundâ€"and pulling it up in one hilarious and smooth motion before handing it to her.

"Thank you Toothless," Astrid said, not able to cover the laugh in her voice. She looked down. "Pants too."

Hiccup frowned.

"Princ-uh-Hiccup, if we're going to be living like this you've got to get used to roughing it."

His face still didn't slacken. So Astrid threw his shirt back at him.

"Fine, wash it yourself, I'll beâ€"" she looked over at a small retention pond in the distance. "â€"Over there".

Astrid could've thought of a million different reasons as to why Hiccup acted that way, but to keep herself calm she simply didn't allow her mind to go there. Instead she just angrily soaked her prison clothes and did her best to hide behind the treesâ€|no need for Hiccup seeing her practically naked, after all.

OoO

_::You're making things more difficult than they need to be::
_Toothless said smugly while Hiccup was ringing out his wet clothes.

He wished he had fled Berk in something lessâ€|bulky. As the clothes he wore to his final duel were a bit overdone, but still, he didn't

want to leave his clothes behind. They were royal garments, and even a little tattered they'd fetch a high price on any market once they got out of Viking territory.

_:::I gather you're talking about Alastair?::: _Hiccup sighed. _:::I'm going to settle everything, don't worry.:::

_:::I'm not the one who's worried.:::

_:::I just don't want her washing my clothesâ€|I mean she did kiss me after allâ€|or he didâ€|orâ€|whatever.:::

_:::This is what I mean.::: _Toothless grumbled and laid down near the water.

_:::No offense but if I wanted your opinion on this I would ask for it. Andâ€|you know, maybe Alastair's not a girl maybe he's justâ€|weird or something?:::

Hiccup looked over at Toothless, he didn't even know why he wasn't expecting the annoyed glare the night fury shot at him.

_:::Didn't you sleep to relieve all of these silly notions?::: _Toothless asked. _:::It seems you've only calmed themâ€|you need to face them and-:::

_:::Alright, alright, I get it.::: _Hiccup rang out of the last of his clothes violently before slamming the damp clothes down on a rock with a muffled slap. The irony of Toothless's words set in as he did so. _:::And like you're one to talk about facing your problems.:::

Two seconds after saying that Hiccup realized he shouldn't have said it. Toothless turned his head away but Hiccup could practically see his body shaking.

_:::Iâ€|didn't mean it that wayâ€|::: _Hiccup made a weak attempt to salvage the conversation, but it shot.

_:::Let me know when your clothes are dry.::: _Toothless said dully.
_:::I'll be resting.:::

_:::Yeahâ€|long flight aheadâ€|::: _Hiccup smiled weakly, but Toothless wasn't even looking. He could tell that Toothless wasn't mad, per say, it was probably the fact that Hiccup was _right _that was making him uneasy.

Restingâ€|Hiccup thought. Maybe Toothless had some inner demons to battle as wellâ€|?

Hiccup looked over at Alastair in the distance. He could barely make her out behind all the trees, but she seemed done with washing out her clothes and was probably waiting for them to dry as he was.

He frowned. Then would've been a perfect time to talk quietly, but his body stayed still until the sun was low and his clothes were dry.

They had wasted half of the next day anywaysâ€|so they'd end up flying close to night in the long run.

Hiccup sighed and leaned back on his palms. The sting at the dragon scratches on his back kicking with stress and last drop of water rolled from his clothes. He slipped on his tunic and was met by Alastair, her prison garb not looking any less tattered, but certainly free of dirt.

"We should get going." She reminded him.

"Yeah," Hiccup looked over at Toothless. Sleeping and thoughts locked. "We probably should."

0o0

Flying endlessly commenced yet again. Toothless was to stay above the clouds, Astrid was to chart out which way they were going the best she could and Hiccup was to scan the waters for Johann. It was a simple and quiet system, as the fights usually consisted of little talking.

But Astrid still wasn't complaining, as talking to Hiccup for hours was the last thing she wanted at the moment. She couldn't even enjoy the luxury of having him so close. Her grip was lose and her eyes on the water despite none of them having flight vests on.

The evening sank in rather quickly and the winds got calmer. The chill in the air was enough to make Astrid wish she had on warmer clothes, as the prison garb wasn't very substantialâ€¦ and she simply wouldn't allow herself to lean into Hiccup. Not after how he reacted by her just asking to wash his clothes.

Instead she continued scanning the waters. But what she ended up spotting wasn't a boat at all, but an islandâ€¦ a familiar island.

She tugged at Hiccup's tunic.

"Do you see him?" Hiccup asked, sounding a bit excited.

"No, butâ€¦" she sighed, the jolt of happiness she felt go through her left just as easily, leaving her with an unsure motive of how to feel.

"What's wrong Alastair?" Hiccup asked, the genuine worry in his voice was calming, but her stomach still turned as she looked down.

"It'sâ€¦ Merkskof. My homeâ€¦."

0o0

Astrid was surprised when Hiccup and Toothless immediately landed on Merkskof, having said nothing after she said that they were flying over her home until they landed on one of the rocky cliffs in the distance from the village.

Hiccup turned, looking at her seriously.

"You go." Hiccup said.

Astrid opened her mouth to speak but closed it quickly. He couldn't show his face anywhere, if a word of his sighting got back to Berk it might mean that a search really would start.

"I-I won't be long." Astrid swallowed. Not really knowing what she was going to do. She hadn't seen her mother in quite a while and there was bound to be tension.

Though she wondered if a news report had gotten back to the village. Headlines of the treason committed by a girl under the name of Hofferson sneaking into the King's Warriors and befriending a dragon alongside the prince was sure to get her mother's attention. She wasn't stupid, of course.

She felt a hand at her shoulder, warm and sturdy amidst her shaking bones. She turned and saw Hiccup and Toothless both there for her.

"It'll be alright." Hiccup said. "We'll be close by if you need us, okay?"

She nodded. "Alright."

And she was off.

The rocky shores under her shoes was a familiar stranger, it had been so long and all she was used to now was the smooth grass on Berk.

Everything was quiet, though. Usually up until the wee hours there were kids playing near the rocks even though they weren't supposed to. Steam from the bakeries could be seen, and just the light bicker of conversation within the markets. But it was nothing but a hallow silence. It almost made Astrid's ears ring.

She wondered what her mother would think of her coming in with messed hair, bruises on her face, and dressed in prison garb. Her mother hardly accepted her as she was before, but would she completely shun her now?

Astrid finally entered the threshold of the village and her stomach sank when she found the source of the quietness within the village.

It was completely destroyed.

She swallowed a lump in her throat but even though saliva poured over it, the lump stayed. Gagging a bit as she walked Astrid felt as if dirt had entered her eyes. The corners leaked and left a stubborn collection of wetness around the rim of her eyes that threatened to fall to tears but never did.

It much reflected her mood. She didn't know whether to completely lose her mind or keep her cool until she found out more.

"H-Hello!" She called out.

No answer.

"Hello!" She called a second time, louder this round, more

desperate. Biting her lip Astrid felt the corners of her eyes grow wetter, wishing she'd just cry already.

What had happened there in the time she was gone? Her home suddenly looked like Berk did after the dragon attack. The market place was charred, the homes caved in. She tripped as she stepped in a deep dragon footprint.

It _was _a dragon attack?

"Whyâ€>??" Astrid mumbled to herself, stopping right in the footprint. "Why here?" The dragons only had interest in Berk because Hiccup was there, and Merkskof so rarely got dragon attacks. It wasn't uncommonâ€|.but it wasn't common either.

"Excuse me young man but whatâ€?" Astrid heard a man's voice, but he stopped when he realized Astrid was, in fact, a girl. "Oh, I'm sorry lass." She sighedâ€|.she really had to cut her hair again, and find better clothing that hid herself more.

Astrid recognized the man, he was the head of the home repair unit. And it seemed as if he had his hands full at the moment. He didn't recognize her, though. Which was goodâ€|Astrid would keep it that way.

"I-I'm a boy," Astrid 'corrected'. "I just favor a girl. It's a real tragedy sometimes.

"I'll bet." The man ushered the best laugh he could.

"What happened here sir?" Astrid asked, more seriously that time.

"Dragon attackâ€|completely out of the blue." He looked up at the sky, his eyes terrified. "Took half the village though. I've never seen such a massacre."

Astrid's throat lurched and she swallowed again but that lump still stayed.

"Do you know the survivors?"

"Aye, but it's mostly women and children. I don't remember you being in the headcount though, what's your name?"

"I umâ€|my name's Alastairâ€|" She said. "I'm not from here, but I know the Hoffersons."

The man's eyes bugged and Astrid's heart sank.

She knew itâ€|.

"Asli Hoffersonâ€|." The man said. "She was the only Hofferson left after Atlas died and Astrid went missing."

_Missing, _Astrid almost laughed. Was that what her mother convinced herself to believe?

"Poor woman," he continued. "Lost her husband, her eldest, and now little Astrid went missing with the Thorston girlâ€|.She was

acceptant of death even before it came."

"So she'sâ€|?" Astrid took the man's shoulders, shaking him. "Is she _alive_?"

"Iâ€|I'm afraid not Alastair."

The pain in the man's eyes was genuine, but all Astrid felt was an incredibly warm rumble through her body before it shook cold and numb. Her fingers bunched in her palms but she didn't feel the touch. She didn't feel anythingâ€|.but her insides. Her nerves were turned inside out and suddenly she felt every pump of blood going through her. Her heart almost blasted as it beat faster and faster.

She knew the man saw her reaction, her pale face and stiff shake. It was the kind of shake that was so rigid it made her skull crack and her teeth crunch.

"I'mâ€|I'm sorry lad." The man said. "Did you come all this way to visit herâ€|.?"

Astrid nodded.

"Wellâ€|I can take you to her home if you'd like."

Another nod. No words.

0o0

Astrid felt her breath leave her as she was shown what was left of her home. The roof was completely caved in, the inside had black marks over the walls. The center was round and let out many marks over the floors and walls. A Zippleback's explosion, no doubt. And she felt that lump return as she put two and two together of what had happened to her mother.

She bit her lip hard, seeing blood drawn but not feeling it.

"M-momâ€|" Astrid muttered to herself.

"Mom?" The man said, unfortunately hearing Astrid's mutters. "Asli didn't have another childâ€|." He spun her around, pulling back her hair roughly and got a good look at her face. "Astrid!?"

Astrid refused to answerâ€|she hadn't answered frequently to that name in so long.

"Wrath of Thor, Astrid, have you lost your mind?" the man yelled. "Your mother is _dead, _she died having a dead son and a missing daughterâ€|.and _now _you come back?"

"I-I'm sorry." Astrid cried.

"Do you know how heartbroken your mother was?"

"I-"

"How she had to die all alone thinking of you still being out there?" he still continued, the grip on her hair tightening.

"Please justâ€|" Astrid whimpered. "I know I'm horrible justâ€|"

"You're more than horrible lassâ€|" the man said before walking off, leaving her in the charred house as she sank to the ground. The floor was coated over with ash, her bottom and pants getting covered but she barely cared even though she had just washed her clothes.

All she could think of was how she just up and left her mother without telling her where she was going. Went to Berk and almost got herself killed.

Almost got killed protecting the one thing that took every member of her family away. Her father whom she barely knew, her older brother Atlas, and now her motherâ€|all killed one by oneâ€|by dragons.

She sniffled. And the worst part wasâ€|she didn't even get to say goodbye to either of them before they died. Not even one.

The time she spent on the floor of the house was a blur to her, all she knew was that when she finally regained her senses, it was completely dark out.

She regained her senses, though, because of a hand, a warm and gentle hand on her shoulder.

She felt warmth come across her back, hands pulling her up.

"Alastairâ€|" Hiccup whispered. "Comeâ€|you shouldn't be here."

She wasn't too surprised that he came for her, but she had no recollection of anything as he walked her back to the highlands where Toothless was waiting. All she remembered was being surrounded by their warmth. Hiccup and Toothless's warmth while they embraced her.

Her friendsâ€|and the only people she had left.

0o0

Hiccup had given himself a timeline that if she wasn't back in two hours he'd go and check, and was shocked that when he put on a cloak to go into the village and saw that everything was destroyed.

It was easy to determine that dragons were the cause, but Hiccup already assumed the worse when he put the clues together. He simply wandered around until he saw a familiar figure in the rumble, and just took Alastair with him.

She was cold, her wrists felt limp, and for the first time she felt so fragile to him. He wanted to just keep her close and keep her safe at the moment, but the thought of it left him feeling odd.

Alastair was a girlâ€|it wasn't like Alastair the boy anymore. When where he mentioned Atlas and Alastair cried he stumbled over on what to do. Now he could just hold her when she got like this.

But it still felt weird.

It felt weird to take her hand and lead her back to the highlands. To see her crying and want to whip her tears away. But still, he pulled her along.

Toothless perked up as they returned.

_::Did she enjoy seeing her kin again?:: _Toothless asked before his face grew more serious. The tension and sadness was in the air. Hiccup wouldn't have been surprised if Toothless sensed it directly from Alastair.

Hiccup brought Alastair over and they both sat against Toothless. The night fury leaned over as well, nudging Alastair softly, as she looked half-dead.

_::What happened?:: _Toothless asked, genuinely worried.

_::I'm not sureâ€|but I think her mother's..umâ€|:: _He didn't need to finish the sentence, even though he was a little lost for words, Toothless sensed what he wanted to finished the sentence with, even if it was uncertain.

Toothless let out a soft whimper, and rested his nose against Alastair's cheek. He got the impulse to lick her but Hiccup recommended not to.

"Alastairâ€|?" Hiccup said softly, her hand was still in his, and he squeezed it. "You have to tell me what happenedâ€|."

"Muhâ€|" Alastair choked out, and Hiccup just leaned closer, rubbing the back of her hand with his thumb. "Momâ€|" she continued. "I'm a horrible childâ€|"

"That's not trueâ€|." Hiccup sighed.

"It _is _true. Hiccupâ€|I left her and I said _nothing_! I justâ€|I just left and ran off to be a warriorâ€|and then I come back and she's deadâ€|she had already lost my fatherâ€|and my brotherâ€|and then I just left her to die alone." She sniffled.

"You couldn't have known this would happen, Alastairâ€|it's justâ€|" Hiccup felt awful that he couldn't get his words right. But what could he really say in the situation?

"I 'm awfulâ€|"

"Alastairâ€|"

"I 'mâ€|I 'm an orphanâ€|I have _no family _left..they're all _gone_. " She cried harder, yanking her hand from his and crying into her knees. It was depressingâ€"to say the leastâ€"to watch.

Hiccup looked at Toothless, as if the dragon had the answer, but Toothless was just as lost and distraught as he was.

_::She has you and I.:: _Toothless said. _::I'm not sure how comforting that'll be coming from meâ€|I am a dragon, after all.:: _Toothless said sadly, ashamed. But Hiccup smiled.

"Alastair, Toothless says that you still have a family." Hiccup said, taking her shoulders in his hands. He drew her close, and Toothless curled around them both. It was a warm comfort. All three of themâ€| "You have me and Toothlessâ€|we're your family now, we'll protect you and stay with you."

He kept her close, trying his hardest to let what he said radiate in every action he did. Alastair was still crying, but she relaxed into the warmth, her loud cried becoming whimpers.

That was a start.

Hiccup and Toothless stayed with her like that for hours after, and all Hiccup could think of was how he had planned to have the conversation with Alastair about what happened between them. But as he looked down at the broken girl in his arms he couldn't bring himself to even think of it any time soon.

At that moment he drew at peace with the fact that Alastairâ€|was Alastair. He didn't care what she was. Alastair needed himâ€|and he was going to be there every step of the way. Just as she had been for him.

She could tell him when she was ready. And they'd have that conversation when _they _were readyâ€|.but that wasn't then.

That wasn't any time soonâ€|.

0o0

The next island over was well over two hours away, and while there was still some night left before the sun rose, Hiccup and Toothless decided to stop. Their schedule was already tremendously off anyways, and Alastair needed to restâ€|

They found another cave and Toothless hallowed out the back a little bit more and set the fire, Alastair rested and Hiccup took the first watch. He had slept a lot already.

_::She'll be alright?:: _Toothless asked apprehensively, pacing around Alastair before looking up. Hiccup almost laughed at how Toothless acted seemingly so delicate when dealing with Alastair. Their friendship was still so new, infancy almost. And Toothless and Alastair couldn't communicate like he and Toothless did.

He could feel the frustration from Toothless, not being able to just read what Alastair was thinking and feeling like he could do with him. He had dealt with humans so little that reading their minds was something the night fury had grown used toâ€|but it was easy to remember that Hiccup was the only human he had really been close to.

_::Yeah, she just needs to sleep a littleâ€|we'll make sure she's okay when she wakes up.:: _Hiccup looked over at Alastair, frowning. He didn't even want to pretend he knew what she was going through. Sure, he had lost his mother as wellâ€|but he had barely known her. The effect wasn't as lasting. The only real memory of her he had was the dagger of her's that his father had given. But even that wasn't with him anymore.

Still, on top of everything that had happened on Berk Alastair had to deal with being an orphan now, as well. Grinding his teeth and bunching his fists Hiccup let out a low growl.

Sometimes life was just soâ€|_cruel. _Why did it have to be so cruel like that?

_:::Sometimes what we're born into is just a horrible fate.:::
_Toothless came up beside him, curling around his human. _:::There's no real escapeâ€|only acceptance.::: _

_:::Well, that's cheery.::: _

_:::But it's true.::: _

Hiccup sighed. _:::I knowâ€|:::

_:::â€|We should do something for her when she wakes up.:::

_:::I was thinking that tooâ€|I just don't know what.::: _Hiccup chewed his lip, realizing in a weird sting that he still barely knew anything intimate about Alastair. What was her favorite food? When was her birthday? What was her _real name_?

Knowing things about Toothless was easy as long as the dragon didn't lock out his thoughtsâ€|he felt more joined because of it. Their channel was free flowing. But him and Alastairâ€|they had the luxury of speaking the same languageâ€|but not of being so close in mind and body.

But stillâ€|he'd have to pry and learn graduallyâ€|nothing too jarring could go on for her at the moment, he wouldn't do that to her.

_:::I'm glad you're coming at peace again.::: _Toothless noted. _:::The clouds in your mind are clearing.:::

_:::For the momentâ€|::: _Hiccup said uneasily but still smiled at the night fury. _:::As long as you two are here. We'll find Johann and straighten out this whole mess.::: _Hiccup looked at the book again, flipping through the pages. The Oriental looking characters still haunting himâ€|if only he could just read them himself without bringing in another party.

Johann was a friend of the familyâ€|but he might turn his back and try to return the traitor prince back to Berkâ€|?

_:::Don't become bogged down again.::: _Toothless warned gently.

_:::I knowâ€|I knowâ€|::: _Hiccup sighed, leaving the book open at the page of the man with the glowing chestâ€|remembering his dream of a girl with the same glow. _:::I just want all this confusion to be overâ€|I want answers.:::

_:::You and I bothâ€|::: _Toothless let out a exhale, an entire weight of problems heaving from his chest. Hiccup felt the weight, it was similar to his. A similar pain and depth of experience.

He reach out then, for Toothless, but in the distance a rumble shook his underside. It felt like the earth was shaking, but such

occurrences rarely happened in those parts. Still, the ground shook.

_:::Wh-what's going on?::: _Hiccup looked at Toothless, though it was possible he was just as confused. Though the dragon pupils narrowed. Toothless _knew _the signs very well.

_:::It'll come from the ground.::: _Toothless said, taking Hiccup's collar and moving him into the cave before a giant snake-like dragon sprouted from the ground, towering into the sky and shooting out rings of fire at the trees.

A Whispering Death.

At first it simply seemed angry and wild but out from the trees came a changewing, shot down in battle. It crashed into the ground with rough impact, but still hobbled up; a little bit of fight left in it.

_:::Childrenâ€|don't touch.::: _Hiccup heard the changewing warn the whispering death. But the whispering dragon paid no heed. It seemed like it only wanted the changewing to get out of its territoryâ€|but her eggs were there and she wasn't moving.

Hiccup immediately ran out of the cave, wanting to stop the fight however he could despite him hearing Toothless's desperate pleas to let the fight be.

He _had _these powersâ€|he had to use them somehow.

Hiccup hardly believed that his ability to communicate with dragons was simply so he could find a girl with a glowing chest.

**So yeahâ€|that was a weird place to stop butâ€|it was really the only place to cut off the chapter before it got into the "if you don't stop here it's going to be too long" stage. **

Despite being suuuper late I'm going to try and get the next chapter up on the 1**st****, but it might be a few days lateâ€|so you might get it on the 5****th**** or something. We'll see how it goes but I will get back on schedule. Promise!**

Review Responses:

Guest1: Why yes, there's **_plenty **_**more chapters. More chapters than you'll know what do with XD**

**BlackWingedAngel: Thank you so much! I'm glad you enjoy the story :) **

**Q â€" A the Authoress: Well there's some interesting twists and turns that happenâ€|you might figure it out but I tried to have a set goal that they're working towards but how they get there is a myyyyystery. **

**Wolffury: Thanks! And Part two, hopefully, is starting off with some interesting plot progressions. **

**92firedemon: I'm sooooo sorry I didn't have this up by your birthday :(but, a new episode of Defenders of Berk aired that day

soâ€|it wasn't a completely dragon-less birthday. I hope you enjoyed the new chapter regardless. And Happy super belated birthday!**

**UseYourImagination: I'm glad you like the story! And I feel as rejuvenated as any tired college student can feel XD And yes, there will definitely be a part threeâ€|and fourâ€|and fiveâ€|and perhaps six. There's a lot of story to tell with these three. I just came off from writing a 4-year story soâ€|I'm used to long fanfics.
**

Ferdoos: See, that's what amuses me. Everyone thought that the end of part one was "the big reveal" andâ€|not really. I've always said that her reveal wasn't going to happen how people expected. It's a very weird "reveal" cause as you see Hiccup clearly knows she's a girl already, but she hasn't really "fessed up" yetâ€|soâ€|let the weirdness continue!

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

RiderofDoom: Thanks, and part two will have plenty to sink our teeth into!

TheDelta724: Aww, thank you! And nopeâ€|Hiccup doesn't know Astrid's real name yetâ€|but this chapter answers that question already XD

**Rose: Wow, all of that huh? XD I'm glad the story gets some emotions out of you (I guess I'm doing my job correctly) just don't get **_*_too **_*_stressed out. **

Wishyouweremedontya: You'll have to wait and seeeeeeeeeeee :)

**Guest2: "Astrid's Reveal" technically hasn't happened yet. Yes, Hiccup knows, but nothing is really said between them on the matter. Astrid hasn't come out and said "I'm a girl, my real name is Astrid, blah blah blah"â€|so the reveal happens rather unconventionally. Everyone was expecting it all to go down in one momentâ€|so I already knew it wasn't going to happen the way anyone expected XD And no, Astrid didn't get violated. If Hiccup hadn't of came when he did she might have thoughâ€|and sure, you can tell me what's on your mind.
**

**PJfan499: Hiccup was really confused XD That's really the best word to use. Confused and shocked. Cause despite Astrid's growing feelings, to Hiccup they were just friends, two **_*_guy **_*_friends. And you know I can't tell you whether you're right or wrong. That's spoilers. But the story's probably a lot more complicated than you think it is. **

PrayerGirl: The cat's not completely out of the bag yetâ€|not everything has been said yetâ€|But Hiccup's not longer in the dark, so that's a step in the right direction!

Guest3: It's interesting to see half of the readers be like "Oh Hiccup's the dragon heart", and then the other half is like "Astrid's the dragon heart". I wonder who's rightâ€|? Or if both sides are wrong? Guess we'll find out soonâ€|.XD

Thanks for all the reviews everyone! And, again, sorry for my lateness but the goal is to have another chapter done somewhere between the 1**st**** and the 5****th**** of next month so, sit tight and stay tuned! **

**Next Chapter: Entrusted and Evicted **

16. Entrusted and Evicted

Okay, who's back in business now? Me!

I'm only a day late, just barely. It's like midnight on the 2**nd**** soâ€|that's not too shabby. Enjoy the chapter, Odin knows I especially enjoyed writing this one!**

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter Sixteen: Entrusted and Evicted

It was the kind of bare-toothed, claw digging fight that Hiccup would've, otherwise, stayed away from.

But he felt it again. The changewing was dyingâ€|.

If anything haunted him about his abilities more it was that he could hear another creature dying. It gave him a window to what death was like. The terror of it, the thoughts racing and slowing down all at the same time. The frantic prayers and regrets. It buzzed in his ears, he _had _to stop it.

Running out of the cave Hiccup put himself square in the middle of the fight, hands outstretched and face dead serious.

_::Enough!:: _Hiccup yelled inwardly.

_::Out of the way little supper:: _The whispering death glared and whipped his tail, smacking him taut in the face, his jaw slackening in contact and it sent Hiccup crashing into the upper rocks of the cave. His spine crunched at the impact and the wound on his back stung with an intensity that only came out as a bit back hiss. Hiccup slid down and Toothless was there to catch him promptly.

::I told you to let the fight be, why are being reckless?::

_::You can't hear it?:: _Hiccup asked, whipping a little blood from his mouth. Toothless's blank expression answered his question. Soâ€|only he could hear the dying process? Lucky him, Hiccup thought dryly.

::That changewing is dyingâ€|I have to help her.:

_::Don'tâ€|help meâ€|...: _Hiccup heard a voice and looked over to the changewing. She staggered up, hobbling in a last attempt to climb the tree, but the whispering death took her in his tail, his spikes digging deep.

The changewing let out a shriek, her mind dimming. Hiccup didn't know whether her thoughts were to herself or to him, but he followed her instructions.

_::Helpâ€|eggsâ€|:: _She wheezed. _::Upâ€|in the treeâ€|save themâ€|please.:: _The spikes dug deeper, and Hiccup lurched back, almost feeling the spines in his own gut.

_::Toothless!:: _Hiccup called out, but the night fury was already on the move. Toothless clawed at the tree, climbing swiftly while Hiccup ran over to the battle, yet again.

The whispering death dropped the changewing, it's red skin punctured and bleeding. Hiccup ran to her side, but the whispering death still lunged at them.

_::Toothless is getting your eggs, don't worry.:: _Hiccup tried to comfort her, all while putting together some kind of plan of getting the whispering death away in a few seconds before he was met with a piercing scream, life being torn away quickly and almost painlessly.

Almost.

Blood spilled over him, his hair wet but he shuddered at what it was wet with. Though to his relief, it wasn't the changewing that died before him, breaking his ears with one last shocked breath as life left without warning.

It was the whispering death. Killed by Alastair.

She was dyed red as she slit the dragon's throat with the sword Hiccup had acquired while he was breaking Alastair out of prison. He looked up at her, whipping the sword back and exhaling before turning around, her blood red face chilling his nerves.

"Sorryâ€|" She said sadly, looking back at the dragon she had just killed. "I just woke up and saw you being attacked and Iâ€|panicked, I guess."

Hiccup looked around. Toothless in the tree, looking ready to leap. No doubt the night fury would've jumped for the kill if Alastair hadn't come in right that moment.

And the dying changewing beside him, relieved but still taking shaky breaths.

The dragon let out a cough, gurgling out acid that made the grass beneath her mouth sizzle. Alastair came up and sat beside Hiccup, reaching forward to the dragon before placing her hand back at her side.

"Is it dead?" Alastair asked.

"Not yetâ€|.but it will be soon."

"We can help it?"

"Noâ€|" Hiccup sighed, clutching his chest. Maybe he has some kind of ability to heal dragons? If he was the only one to hear them die then maybe he could bring them back to life tooâ€|?

_::Can you still hear meâ€|?:: _Hiccup called out to the

changewing.

_::Strange humanâ€|:: _The changewing breathed. _::Able to speakâ€|like usâ€|:_

Toothless came down from the tree, trying to balance the five eggs as best he could without dropping any. Hiccup smiled placing a comforting hand on the changewing's forearm.

_::Toothless has your eggs and the whispering death is dead, you're safe now.:: _He reassured her, but he could still feel the life slipping away. Odin must've been with her for so long to keep her alive, but Hiccup felt the one fighting will that kept her heart pumping just a little longer.

::Please take careâ€|the eggs.::

Hiccup looked back over at Toothless, the night fury was sniffing the eggs curiously. Was she really asking he look after her eggs?

_::I-I uhâ€|I'm not aâ€|:: _He stumbled but immediately stopped himself. This dragon was dying. And he wouldn't deny her one last wish. Especially if it was as noble as finding someoneâ€"anyoneâ€"to watch her unborn hatchlings. Hiccup took a breath and nodded.

_::I'll watch over your eggsâ€|don't worry.:: _Hiccup offered her his best smile, but the concept of a smile didn't even register to her. Still, his gesture must've emitted some kind of calming gesture, because as Hiccup felt the last breath leave her body, there was a relief that left with it.

Toothless let out a sigh as well.

_::I'm sorry I agreed so quickly for all of us,:: _Hiccup said to Toothless. _::But I couldn't deny her a dying wishâ€|:_

_::No need to apologize, it's human of you.:: _Toothless looked off into the distance, the eggs still tucked with him. _::I'm surprised she even asked youâ€|most instincts call for simply letting nature have it's way.:: _

::You mean another dragon would've just left her eggs there to hatch and then be defenseless!?: Hiccup asked. That was like leaving a newborn baby just to fend for itself in the woods just because it's mother died.

Toothless still looked away. _::Animals are different than humansâ€|it's just the way things are, lots in life are chosen.:: _Toothless looked at him, there was a slight tug in his mouthâ€"a smileâ€"something human that Hiccup was still amazed that Toothless picked up. _::I'm glad that I'm here to learn from you, though.:: _Toothless said, genuinely. _::You have a good heart, any dragon can sense it.::_

"Umâ€|" Alastair spoke up, still clutching the sword but obviously confused. Hiccup still could only imagine how weird it was for her. He had already had two conversations yet all she heard was silence. He reached out without thinking and took her hand, giving her a serious look.

"We're all going to be parents soon."

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Astrid wasn't too on board with all of them suddenly taking on five eggs to raiseâ€"so Hiccup put itâ€"but she couldn't really deny him. She was too tired to argue and too drained to really be too much of anything.

Hiccup said they'd stay on that island for another day to figure out how they'd travel with the eggs, and for her to rest some more. And she appreciated the brain dead time. She wished her life would just slow down and give her time to reactâ€|but being with a banished prince and a night fury didn't really seem like the slow kind of life either way.

She sat against the tree, after washing the blood off of her clothes, surprisingly not bothered by two dead dragons not too far off in the distance. Death seemed to just be following her around, she concluded, and she decided to just be numb to it. She wouldn't allow herself to cry anymore over her mother or worry Hiccup and Toothless anymore than she probably already had.

The way they both looked at her, always having worry in their eyes, always treating her gingerly, telling her everything gently. It made her feel fragileâ€|and she didn't need to feel that way.

Hiccup and Toothless examined the eggs and apparently Toothless determined that they'd hatch in just a few weeks or so. They just needed to be kept secure and not to move them around too much.

There was one egg, though, that was cracked, probably from the fight earlier, and made Toothless worry that it wouldn't hatch at all.

When Hiccup told her all of that, she simply nodded and took it all in. But she couldn't help butâ€"horriblyâ€"think that one less egg to take care of would be better.

She leaned against the tree again, sighing and looking up into what she could see of the sky. It was mostly covered by the treetops, but little peaks of blue shown through.

And then a night fury's nose entered her vision and she jolted up.

"Oh..it's just you Toothless." The dragon sat next to her, giving her those same worried eyes Hiccup did. "I'm alright, just taking a little mind vacation." Toothless leaned against her, pressing his nose into her side, as if he wanted her to come in the cave with him and Hiccup.

"I'm really okay, Toothless, I justâ€|wanna sit outside for a little while." She sighed, and pressed her back against the bark. "The air's clear out hereâ€|."

Toothless stayed, since she wasn't moving he just sat beside her, his tail came around her, and she smiled a little before getting a good look at his prosthetic fin. It was a very impressive piece of

machinery. And Astrid laughed as she could still see the place where Hiccup messed up on the stitching when they made it.

Still, she had never taken the time to wonder how it must've been for Toothlessâ€|being with humans so much, having a human contraption as his only way to get around. Despite all thatâ€|Astrid always felt a little envious of Toothless. He could read Hiccup's mind after all.

That boy never ceased to amaze Astrid, but she often wondered what it would be like to know his thoughts. It would sure make everything between them currently a whole lot easier.

Toothless looked at her again, blocking her view and only then did she realize her gaze had drifted right onto Hiccup. Astrid hated being caught staringâ€|and it was even worse that it was by Toothless, who'd probably tell Hiccup in a moreâ€|detailed manner.

"What's it likeâ€|being able to read his mind?" She still asked, the thought apparently still lingering. Though she felt silly, she knew Toothless couldn't answer her. Yet she still prodded further. "Do you know if he hates meâ€|for lying to him? Does he even know I lied to him yet?"

She really didn't have any real way to tell that he knew what she was. He still called her Alastairâ€"not that he'd know her real name anywaysâ€"still hadn't brought up the kiss. And given what had just happenedâ€|he was amazingly sympathetic and gentle towards her.

"Once he finds the Dragon Heartâ€|I wonder what that'll mean for you and meâ€|?" She looked at the night fury, smiling sadly. "Hiccup has this grand destiny waiting for him, I can feel itâ€|I just hope both of us will fit into it." She laughed bitterly. "Though you probably have a better chance than meâ€|being related to Nidhogg and all."

Toothless wasn't too amused by that one, and growled at her.

"Sorryâ€|too close to the bone?" She bit her lip, but Toothless's anger subsided just as quickly as it came. He gave her a soft gaze, sharing her worry, perhaps?

"But thenâ€|he saidâ€|he said that we were all a family now. You even agreed with that didn't you?" She asked and Toothless gave her a nod. Astrid reached out and scratched under Toothless's chin gently and smiled. "Thenâ€|maybeâ€|"

She felt a slimey wetness gloss over her in one quick motion before she realized that Toothless had licked her. She didn't know whether to be flattered or disgusted. She had seen Toothless lick Hiccup from time to time. It usually seemed endearing despite it being utterly gross. Still, in the nature of the situation, it seemed the equivalent to a hug.

She ran her fingers through her hair, slimey strands following her fingers. And she had just washed her clothes, too.

"Just give me a heads up next time you wanna do that, okay Toothless?" She laughed, a good natured, hearty laugh regardless. It felt good. Maybe that was the night fury's plan all along.

"Sounds like I'm missing a good time over here." Hiccup suddenly walked over, seeing Astrid coated in saliva. "Oh, he got you, huh?" Hiccup laughed as well. "He's been wanting to do that for a while, ever since!" Hiccup trailed then, not finishing the sentence.

"Well despite this being really nasty, it put me in a better mood." She smiled at him and the fact that he beamed back at her made her smile even more.

"Thanks for, um saving me back there, by the way." Hiccup said, scratching his head as he looked over at the dead whispering death in the distance.

"No problem." She bit her lip, wondering how sappy she should be. "And thanks for being there for me last night. And saying all that stuff, it helps knowing I still have people!"

"And I meant it too, Alastair, we're family." Hiccup reassured her, grabbing both of her shoulders and held them firmly. She looked in dead in the eyes for the first time in a while, and for the first time in a while, as well, she felt like she could.

She got that silly urge again. To kiss him. But she swallowed it back. No more of thatâ€|no more testing the limits of their fragile relationship.

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It was nighttime when the eggs began to glow near the fire stoke and while Hiccup and Astrid first took alarm at it, Toothless assured them that the eggs were fine.

"I guess changewing eggs really do glow." Hiccup leaned back, poking at his fish.

"I still can't believe we have to take care of five baby dragons and find this dragon heartâ€|girl." Astrid took a rough bite from her fish, chewing loudly.

"Well geez, spread the joy, why don't you." Hiccup rolled his eyes but Astrid just chewed more. "Look, we're in the situation so let's just deal with it."

Astrid looked back at the eggs and wished she felt more sympathetic, given that it was the changewing's dying wish, though she just didn't feel like this was going to turn out well. Especially since their main goal was being discrete. But she knew why Hiccup agreedâ€|that's just the kinda guy he was.

One of the eggs began to shake, a little too violently to just be mid-hatching kicking and Hiccup ran over to grab the egg.

"I thought Toothless said the eggs wouldn't hatch until a few weeks from now!?" Astrid asked, a little worried and ran over to Hiccup as well. The egg felt warm, even for dragon standards, the heat emitted

was enough to make her sweat even though she wasn't touching it. Hiccup placed the egg on the floor and he, Astrid, and Toothless all gathered around it.

Toothless sniffed the egg, examining it. It was the egg that was cracked.

"Do you think something's wrong with it?" Astrid asked though she looked over and saw that Hiccup and Toothless were already communicating.

"Toothless says either the dragon's infected from the overexposure from the crack before it's supposed to hatchâ€|orâ€|it's sâ€|about to hatch."

"Okayâ€|" Astrid nodded slowly. "So what do we do?"

Hiccup took off his outer tunic "We should keep it covered just to keep the crack closed off." He wrapped the tunic around the egg, hissing a little at the heat. Astrid sighed and reached out her arms.

"I'll hold it. You and Toothless just go get some water."

Both Hiccup and Toothless looked at each other quizzically.

"Well what if the second thing that Toothless said is true? What if it's going to hatch soon. We should have some water handy for itâ€|especially sinceâ€"" she hissed as well at the heat of the egg as she took it. "â€"It's so hot."

"A-alright." Hiccup immediately stood. "We'll be back soon. Stay safe Alastair. Please."

"I should be telling you that." Astrid rolled her eyes as the two disappeared into the forest.

The sword was left there, so even if a dragon were to come in the cave, she could at least defend herself. It was oddâ€|how even after everything that had happened, she still had very little reserve in killing a dragon, especially if it was out of protection. She hardly believed that all dragons were soulless anymoreâ€|but Astrid refused to lose another family member behind a dragon. She'd stain as many swords as she had to with the blood of who ever tried to take Hiccup and Toothless away from her.

They were all she had left, after all.

She held the egg a little tighter, but it was still burning despite it being covered. The heat was getting a little too scalding and she had to take the egg out of her lap and put it on the ground. She watched the egg twitch and bunch in the tunic.

An unbearable heat came seeping through the shirt, and Astrid saw some watery red slime seep out from the tunic, burning it.

"What's going on in there!?" Astrid yelped and took Hiccup's tunic off the egg just in time before the rainbow hues of the egg all began to burn bright red, and suddenly a loud boom exploded in front of her.

She was sent back into the wall of the cave, her hair crised a little while she scrambled to put it out before looking over and seeing that the egg was gone and with it was a tiny changewing.

Too tiny.

It let out a sneeze, little red drops coming from its nostrils. But it didn't look like blood, and the drops seemed to sizzle a little as they hit the ground. It was acid.

Luckily, though, the changewing wasn't any bigger than her hand, even baby terrible terrors were bigger. It seemed too skinny, and its skin was a dingy red rather than bright sanguine like its mother was.

The dragon looked up at Astrid then, its eyes wide when it saw her and immediately it stepped away from the cracked remainders of its egg and went over to her, still sneezing acid.

Astrid tried to back away from the dragon as best she could but it kept cooing at her. Seeming lost and confused, and seeking her for answers. Despite the danger, Astrid couldn't look in those eyes for too much longer before she began to reach out rather than back away.

"H-hey there little guy." She stuttered. "I'm not your mama but I'm here to take care of you I guess!" The dragon turned his head in confusion, eyes still wide. He crawled up into Astrid's outstretched hand, taking careful steps to get himself in her palm. Astrid helped the dragon the rest of the way, pushing him from the bottom.

"There you go." Astrid lifted her palm. The tiny changewing fit right inside. "You're awfully tiny, aren't you?"

"Alastair!" Astrid heard Hiccup and Toothless run into the cave. They both had pouches of water in tow. "We heard an explosion, what?" Their eyes fell on the tiny dragon in Astrid's hand. "What is that?" Hiccup raised a brow.

"It's a changewing he hatched." Astrid smiled crossly.

Both Hiccup and Toothless went over to the dragon, looking at him closely. But the changewing only let out a little shriek and crawled up Astrid's arm, hiding on her neck and nuzzled into her hair.

"I uh, think he's scared." Astrid tried to laugh it off, but Hiccup looked a little hurt.

"Yeah, no kidding. He he won't even let me talk to him." Hiccup leaned back, scratching his head.

"Maybe he doesn't understand you? He is a baby, maybe he has to learn to communicate just like humans have to learn to talk?" Astrid said, giving the little changewing a light pet. The dragon purred happily, staying at the 'safe place' on her neck.

"Maybe" Hiccup trailed, before looking over at Toothless. More communicating and he let out a sigh a few minutes later.

"What did Toothless say?" Astrid looked up.

"The changewing was born prematureâ€|so he doesn't communicate correctly. That part of him hasn't developed yet. Butâ€|Toothless is pretty sure that since you're the first thing the baby saw, he's taken to you. He probably thinks you're his mother."

Astrid blushed. "What!?" She scooted back a little. "You've gotta be kidding me."

Hiccup looked at Toothless once more before shaking his head to her. "Nopeâ€|you'reâ€|" Hiccup then switched, covering his mouth to bite back a laugh, but it still came out as snort. "You're a mother, Alastair."

Astrid only rolled her eyes as Hiccup belt out a laugh.

"Yeah, yeah, that's real funny." She looked at the changewing on her. Still, so tiny. "I didn't even know changewings came this small."

"They don't" Hiccup whipped a few laughing tears from his eyes. "It wasn't due to hatch for a few more weeks, but I guess when the egg cracked it justâ€|hatched early." Astrid could tell that Hiccup was mostly thinking up of all of that on the spot, but he was probably right for the most part.

And now she was responsible for a tiny changewing that came into the world too early and couldn't even communicate with anyone. She looked at the dragon again, suddenly moved with pity. How scary that must've been. Being brought into a world where nothing made sense, and no one spoke the same language. But then, this dragon had lost his mother too. Soâ€|they had that in common.

The changewing hiccupped against her and seemed to burp up a little red stone. It was grainy and flat.

"You're just a strange little guy aren't you?" Astrid smiled, and the changewing burped up another rock.

"Toothless has never seen a changewing that coughs up rocks beforeâ€|that's interesting." Hiccup leaned back on his heels.

"Well, he is premature, who knows what interesting abilities he hasâ€|" Astrid petted the little dragon gently.

"What are you gonna name him?" Hiccup asked, and Astrid chewed on the thought. She looked at the changewing once more, and he sneezed again, a cute, little choo of a sound.

"Nimfir" Astrid laughed and took the changewing from her neck, bringing her to face her. "From now on, you're Nimfirâ€|'Nim' for short." The dragon blinked at her before letting out what seemed like a happy sound. It's little arms and legs kicked happily.

"Welcome to the family Nimfir." Hiccup said gently and Toothless sniffed the little dragon yet again. Nimfir whimpered a bit but Astrid shushed him.

"It's alright, Nimfir" she assured. "Toothless won't hurt you." Little Nimfir still whimpered but he didn't wiggle as much when Toothless nudged him. "He'll have to get used to you two." Astrid said and placed the changewing back on her shoulder. Nimfir immediately retreated back to her hair.

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It was the next morning when Toothless suggested that they all stay on the island until the eggs hatched.

::W-what!?: Hiccup exclaimed, though. _::Toothless have you forgotten the real reason we're out here? It's to look for Johann to start getting some answers from this book and find the-::_

_::I know, but, we're all exhausted.:: _Toothless looked over Hiccup's shoulder at Alastair. She was playing with Nimfir, smiling fondly. _::She's doing better but I think it's at least sympathetic to let her relax for a little longer.:: _Toothless's gaze fell back on Hiccup. _::And you as well. You need to slow down and relax.::_

_::Well thanks, mom.:: _Hiccup heaved a combination of a sigh and a smile.

All and all, he knew Toothless was right in the long run. He had been pushing himself too hard, wanting to fly around like a madman to find Johann when they didn't even have any leads.

Hiccup had suddenly wished that maybe he had taken the advantage of being near civilization back on Merkskof and asked someone if Johann had come to port any time soon. But given what had happened there, he knew why he didn't. Stillâ€|the thought occurred to Hiccup that they might wander aimlessly searching for Johann until they got out of Viking waters.

Hiccup knew that once they got to the mainlands they'd be a little safer, but there were still scouting boats and sparse settlements of their people all in the northern mainlands. He sighed. They're best bet was to keep going until they hit Anglo-Saxonâ€|but that was all the way at the end of the North Sea. And he didn't know too much about the terrain outside the Viking waters. Well, not without a map.

_::See, you're already getting worked up.:: _Toothless scoffed.

_::I have to get worked up!:: _Hiccup yelled. _::What if we can't find Johann in these waters and we have to break the boarder and go into other countries? We don't even have a mapâ€|::_ Hiccup looked back over at Alastair. _::And now that we have all these eggs I don't know if we can keep up this whole island hopping lifestyle.:: _He exhaled, more weight feeling like it piled on his shoulders despite the out-breath. _::I meanâ€|we're still wearing the same clothes, all we've been eating is fish, you're exhausted, I'm going crazy, Alastair just lost her motherâ€|ugh!:: _Hiccup planted his face straight in the dirt, not caring about it getting in his mouth and nose. _::When did this all become such a mess?::_

Toothless laid his head on Hiccup's back, pushing him further into

the dirt.

_::I wish I could help moreâ€|::: _Toothless said, in and sympathetic tone instead of the snarky quips Hiccup was expecting. He felt the night fury lick the back of his neck before pulling him up. _::All I can really do is fly you to where you need to goâ€|:::_

_::And, believe me, that's more than anything else.::: _Hiccup said.
_::And, you know, you're more than just transportation to us, right? We're family.::: _Hiccup felt the need to keep reassuring. Reassuring Alastair. Reassuring Toothless. Reassuring himself. That these threeâ€|well, four now including Nimfir. They were all his family now. And they'd all head beyond the borders they'd all been encased in all this time to find a new life and purpose. It was a little scary, but he swallowed back his fears and reminded himself that he was surrounded by the ones who accepted him no matter what.

Toothless's ears perked up, his claws curling giddily. _::It's oddâ€|I've always had a family. A mother and a father. I've always had a purpose and was taken care of. But now with you twoâ€|it's the first time I actually feel like I really have a family.::: _Toothless said, the words poured from his heart, genuine and feeling as if the buildup had taken so long to release. It was a burst that made Hiccup's heart swell. He could feel every emotion that came from the words.

Toothless had never been so open before, Hiccup smiled, and wrapped his arms around the night fury's neck tightly.

_::I know what you mean.::: _Hiccup breathed, trying to not cry like a baby, but the past few days were emotionalâ€|.

_::We'll make it through all of this, but we have to slow down and compose ourselves. Everything will happen in due time how fate directs it.::: _Toothless said calmly, leaning in and closing his eyes. They were both calm, both warm.

Hiccup felt a pair of eyes staring at him though, and looked over a little to see Nimfir sitting on the ground, looking at the pair wide-eyed and curious.

"Sorry," Alastair came running up. "He's just being nosy. I'm sorry he intruded on your..umâ€|moment." She laughed it off.

"Nah, it's okay. You guys can join too, if you want." He reached out a hand to Nimfir. "That is, if you like me now, Nimfir."

The tiny changewing still took tentative steps towards Hiccup, stopping short and looking over at Alastair. She walked over to them and sat close to Hiccup and Toothless, only then did Nimfir close the distance and join in as well.

"He's learning." She said.

"Well he's only two days old." Hiccup laughed. "Butâ€|Toothless thinks we should stay on this island until the other eggs hatch."

"Really?"

"Yeahâ€|it's probably best. It's quiet here and it'll be pretty hard to transport the eggs safely. Plusâ€|" Hiccup placed a hand on her shoulder. "We're all tired, we need to rest up. We've got a lot of flying ahead of us, especially if Johann isn't in Viking waters anymore."

She chewed on the thought before agreeing.

"Whatever you two decide is fine with me. As long as we're all together." Alastair smiled and Nimfir chirped. "And you too, Nimfir. And your future little brothers and sisters."

"You're turning into quite the mother, Alastair. Who would've guessed." Hiccup teased.

"Shut up."

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Five days passed in a lazy daze. The days were slower now that they sat around and relaxed. The chill of the wind seemed a little too strong for that time of year but even so, it was still calming. Hiccup had only wished Nimfir hadn't burned some of his outer tunic. It was expensive black royal garments. He could probably still fetch a high price on the markets for it but not as much as he could've with it intact. And once they got out of roughing it, they'd have to find a way to make money to live off of, and quickly.

"The first thing we have to do is get a map, and find out a way to hide Toothless when we get to local areas. Anglo-Saxon is a pretty developed area. I'm sure they have search towers and everything." Hiccup said as they ate dinner around the fire that fifth night.

"Then we have to sell whatever we can to earn some money, my clothes are probably the only thing we've got, though. And the sword is pretty well made tooâ€|"

"And just leave ourselves defenseless?" Alastair interjected, feeding Nimfir.

"We've got Toothless!" Hiccup spat.

"I like to have a defense I can carryâ€|and since I don't have my axe anymore I've got to have _something._"

_:::Why do you have to hide me?::: _Toothless asked. _:::Your people's waters end soon so there's no need for it.::: _

_:::Not necessarily, I'm not sure what every country's relationship is with dragons, so until I find out you'll have to hide.::: _Hiccup could tell Toothless wasn't happy. But he wasn't going to risk Toothless being hunted. Though it did raise the interesting awareness that Toothless had never been beyond Viking territory either. And if he had, he didn't know much about the humans outside the borders.

"Is Toothless worried about something?" Alastair asked.

"He just doesn't like having to hide."

"Well he might not have to. I mean, it's good to plan just in case we don't find Johann here but if we do then there will be no need to find an elaborate place to hide Toothlessâ€|.right?" Hiccup frowned at Alastair's words.

"Ifâ€|he allows us to travel with him." It was easy to forget that Johann might've been wordly but that didn't mean he'd accept a banished prince, a traitor, and a rogue night fury to travel with him right on the spot. He knew Alastair probably forgot that as well. "If not, I'm sure there's other linguist we can go to and have the book translated once we get to the mainlands."

"Yeahâ€|I guess you're right." Alastair sighed. "But, we can't let them know we're Vikings. I don't know much about our outer-land relationships but I know anyone converted to mainland's religion isn't very fond of us. So if you sell your clothes you have to make it seem like you stole it from a Vikingâ€|"

Both Hiccup and Alastair let out a bitter laugh despite the serious tone.

"I knowâ€|" Hiccup said. "It's all so complicated, right?"

Thunder boomed outside and everyone jumped a little. Nimfir climbed into Alastair's hair again, quivering.

"It's getting so cold out, I wasn't expecting it to rain." Alastair noted. "And all of this lightning. I really wish this could've waited a few more days, Nimfir's nerves are still pretty bad."

Toothless looked up, growling a little each time the lightning struck. Hiccup could tell he didn't like it, snatches from past experiences popping up quickly that Hiccup couldn't quite grasp.

_:::What's wrong, Toothless?::: _

_:::Lightning isn't the only thing out there.::: _Toothless said.

_:::What do you mean?::: _Hiccup asked, growing worried. But he quickly put two and two together. _:::You don't mean a skrill, do you?::: _First a whispering death, then a skrill. He knew they were a wild dragon's neck of the woods but skrills were so reclusive. It was tough to even find one. But it was just their rotten luck to happen upon one with eggs in tow.

_:::This island's pretty bare in terms of other dragons living here. A perfect spot to gain some peaceful territory.::: _Toothless explained.

_:::So, what should we do?::: _

_:::We should leave. As quickly as possible. It might not be a threat but better to leave safely.::: _Toothless suggested and got up, looking over at the eggs. _:::It'll be a bit of a bumpy ride with the eggs, though.:::_

_:::We didn't even think of how to transport them since we planned to just stay here until they hatched. And we don't have any baskets or

anything.::_ Hiccup looked at Toothless's saddle. There were a few small compartments. Enough to fit the book inside. Another for a couple of fish and to squish in water pouches. But none were wide enough to fit four changewing eggs. He only wished they had made a basket when they had the time to.

::_I'll go get some vines:: _Toothless was already on top of things.
::_That'll have to do for now.::_

::_Be careful, Toothless, are you sure you don't want me to do it?
I'm less noticeable.::_

::_But I'm quicker.::_ _Toothless was already outside at that point.

"Alastair, start packing up Toothless's saddle." Hiccup said and Alastair snapped up, looking confused. "Toothless says a skrill is here and it's best that we leave and not interfere with whatever it's here for."

Alastair swallowed. "O-okay. Come on Nimfir." She immediately gathered up their stuff, stuffing the saddle. Hiccup put out the fire and went over to the eggs, trying to wrap them best he could in his tunic, but it wasn't long enough to hold all the eggs. Tying the vines together and making a net was really the best they could do at the moment.

Toothless returned with a mouthful of vines sooner than Hiccup expected.

"Alastair, start tying the vines together into a net for the eggs. Tie it as tightly as possible while I saddle up Toothless." Hiccup ordered again, wincing a little at how bossy he was suddenly being but Alastair just nodded and went to tying.

::_How does it look out there?::_ Hiccup asked while putting on the saddle.

::_It's definitely a territory matter.::_ _Toothless confirmed.
::_He's best left alone, so we should fly a little more north before we head south.::_

::_Whatever you think is best.::_ Hiccup sighed and looked over at Alastair. "How's it going over there?" He asked her.

"I don't know how much this is gonna hold, vine isn't the best for intricate knotting, you know." Alastair sighed, hoisting the makeshift net filled with eggs over her shoulder. "But, it'll have to do. And at least since Nimfir already hatched there's only four eggs to carry and not five."

They secured the netting onto the sides of the saddle best they could, but Alastair still had to hold the eggs in her lap. She placed Nimfir inside her shirt, tying Hiccup's burnt outer tunic around her to hold the little changewing close to her as extra support just in case.

"You good there little guy?" Alastair asked and Nimfir chirped.
"Okay, Hiccup, Toothless we're ready."

"Alright. Alastair, you and Nimfir two look for the very next island we can find out of the skrill's reach. But please hang on as best you can, we don't have flying vests."

"Right."

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Taking Toothless's advice they flew north once leaving the cave, as the beach and skrill overhead were to the south. Luckily it was night and the rain was a perfect cover for them to escape quickly and unseen.

Nimfir, not enjoying the rain squirmed and whined and despite Alastair's efforts to calm him down but the noise was starting to pierce the rain.

"Alastair!" Hiccup groaned.

"I'm trying to calm him down but he's not used to getting wet from the rain." She said.

_:::Toothless, is a skrill's hearing good?:::

_:::Not especially, well, at least not by dragon standards.:::

-

_:::And by human standards?:::

_:::It's best to be as quiet as possible. Though if it heard us already it would've sensed my wings effecting the air density not the baby.::: _

Hiccup frowned, trying to concentrate on finding the skrill's thoughts if he could, but his mind was much too frazzled to really do it correctly.

_:::Leave fending him off to me, just worry about finding a new island and keeping the eggs safe.::: _Toothless said and they finally banked to the south, taking a wide right turn to avoid getting in the skrill's range.

Nimfir still kept whining though as the rain picked up and the lighting seemed to keep striking with forced intensity.

"Are you sure it was a good idea to be out here? This lightning is really bad and you know how much the Gods hate metal." Alastair made a nod towards Toothless's prosthetic.

"We don't have a choice. Staying on the island would've been trouble eventually if the skrill moves its territory there."

_:::Oh noâ€|::: _Toothless suddenly let out a growl.

_:::W-what is it? What's-?::: _Hiccup asked before looking up and seeing the skrill raging overhead.

_:::T-Toothless.:::

_:::Tell the girl to hold on to the eggs, you and Iâ€|we have work

together. Just put me in the right place and I'll take care of it.::: _Toothless said, immediately going into a nose dive.

Alastair grabbed onto Hiccup urgently, squeezing the eggs and Nimfir between them. "Hiccup!"

"Just hold on, okay?"

Alastair nodded into his back, holding on tightly. But Hiccup's heart pounded as the skrill got closer, the lighting around them was almost blinding. He felt the hairs all over his body straighten Nimfirm squirming between him and Alastair, and the eggs jostled.

It wasâ€|. going to be one of _those _nights.

0o0

Hiccup coughed against the breath being pushed into him, the warmth releasing air into his lips left and he woke to look up at Alastair staring at him, he couldn't tell if her face was stained with tears or just wet, but before he knew it his surroundings kicked in.

The raging ocean surrounding him, the patter of the lighter rain against his hair, and the roughness of Toothless's body supporting him.

"Hiccup!" Alastair hugged him tightly. "I'm sorryâ€|I'm sorryâ€|."

"Alastairâ€|Toothlessâ€|whatâ€|?"

_:::It's my faultâ€|::: _Toothless frowned.

"What are you twoâ€|?"

"It's my fault the eggs areâ€|" Alastair cried and then Hiccup's memory snapped.

The eggs. The skrill.

They maybe lasted four minutes in battle before Toothless's prosthetic got hit by the skrill's lighting and they went spirally down. The storm raged the oceanâ€|and while Hiccup last remembered trying to go after the eggs as deep down in the water as he could go the rest was a blackout that even the rainbow glow of the changewing eggs couldn't shine through.

Did he save themâ€|?

"I should've never let go of them, I'm so sorryâ€|" Alastair continued to cry. "I-I lost our familyâ€|"

"No, Alastairâ€|" Hiccup hugged her and looked down. They were just barely treading the water on Toothless's back, the connectors on his prosthetic were separated. And without his smithy back on Berkâ€|it was a permanent setback.

The eggs were gone in the oceanâ€|but it seemed Nimfir was still fine, squirming in Alastair's shirt as she hugged him tightly.

:It's not your fault either Toothless. Hiccup assured. If anything he felt like it was _his _fault. He's the one to agreed to watching the eggsâ€|and the one who passed out trying to save them. Now the only one of the changewing's hatchlings that survived was, ironically, the premature one. He hadn't even managed to keep the dying wish of the changewing back on the island.

He knew Alastair saw everything as just losing more family, so he held her close. But Toothlessâ€|he could feel the guilt coming off of the night fury, almost in waves. The uselessness he suddenly felt because of the position he was in, not being able to fly. Losing the fight against the skrill and not being able to defendâ€|

:I'm sorry I couldn't protectâ€|the family. Toothless said.

"Just stop it! Both of you!" Hiccup cried, crushing Alastair against him on reflex. "We all have to justâ€|justâ€|" He sniffled, trying to hold back whatever emotional guilt trip he was trying to work up. "We've gotta keep our heads andâ€|"

It was no useâ€|.

He started crying as wellâ€|

"Hi-Hiccupâ€|" Alastair muffled into his shoulder.

"Mmm?"

"Is that a scouting ship?"

Hiccup turned, looking over his shoulder and his eyes widened. The fog of the rain over the ocean muffled the view but he recognized the head of that bow anywhere.

"N-No." Hiccup felt a tug at his lips. Although scouting ships weren't uncommon. Warrior recruits had scouting ships that were going beyond the borders all the time, but _this _ship certainly wasn't Viking-made.

"That's Johann's shipâ€|"

Alrighty, Johann's finally gonna make his entrance, hopefully he can actually do what Hiccup needs him to do.

**And what do you all think of little Nimfir? And before anyone says anything like "changewings don't cough up rocks or have red acid" Nimfir is premature, so the effects of his acid are a little weird. I even took a mental visit back to my high shool chemistry class and researched some different type of acid properties and everything. Hahahaz! And, 10 points to anyone who can figure out what Nordic word Nimfir's name is based off of. **

**Review Responses: **

Guest1: Glad you liked it, but you know I can't answer who the Dragon Heart is. You're just going to have to wait and see :)

M4yui: Thanks! Hope you enjoyed this one!

Ferdoos: Blah, did I have a typo somewhere in the beginning of the chapter? Ugh, I don't even remember mentioning cauldrons at the beginning but I'll go back and check XD

**Wolffury: Thanks! And yeah, it was a tear-jerker, and I'm glad I'm still surprising people with where the story's going. I don't think anyone was expecting this little detour either. **

**TheDelta724: Yay for thick plots! XD And it's good to be back. This story grows on me so of course it's here to stay. **

Lilo202: Hmmâ€œ|I guess it's not too spoilery to say that, yes, Norse Gods will be playing some major to minor roles as the story goes on as well as some legendary locations.

StorSpeaker: Yeah, though situationally speaking it's a little understandable as to **_how **_**he would act that way. Not that it was any less jerky. But glad you enjoyed the chapter!**

92firedemon: Haha, well I'm on time today, so hopefully that makes up for it!

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

Q-A Authoress: Haha, sorry but if anything happened to Hiccup, Astrid would probably get the book. I meanâ€œ|Alastairâ€œ|I meanâ€œ|Astridstairâ€œ|XD

Rose: Oh, you slay me with your emotional investment and whatnot. Keep on being an awesome reader, I'm glad you like the story so much!

Non-heinous: Gaaaah! I just realized who you are. You're from the httyd fandom on tumblr! I love love LOVE your art! I'm very flattered you like the story and you keep being awesome.

Prayergirl: Yeah if there's one thing I enjoy about this stage of the story it's really focusing on Hiccup, Toothless, and Astrid forming a really good familial bond. Especially since all the outside pressures of Berk are out of the way. And they've even got a "baby" now XD

TheGaangsAllHere: Oh, I'm glad someone caught that parallel! Cause that was the exact scene that inspired me to write the dialogue that way. Avatar will always be my first love XD

Guest2: Aww, I'm sorry. Don't cry too much.

Wishyouweremedontya: At this point in the story, anyone's open to be the dragon heart. Could be Astrid, Hiccup, could be someone who hasn't even been introduced yet. We shall see. Though I can say that Astrid's role in particular in this story should fulfill your "gentlemen in distress" needs, for sure. And, maybe you caught the little sneak romantic moment in this chapter between Hiccup and Astrid, particularly near the end. But the chapter is early and on the first so haha, and ha!

**Thanks for all the reviews everyone! Someone of you guys are
really ****getting into this story. Makes me proud and a little
scared all at the same time XD But anyways, looks like we're back on
schedule so if all goes well I'll be back on the 15****th**** with
something new for ya!**

17. Gaining and Revealing

I live yet again!

For those of you who kept up with my page hereâ€"or follow me on tumblrâ€"you know I've been super busy with a variety of different things, mostly school. But I'm on summer break now and have a lot more free time so this story is starting back up with its bi-monthly updates!

Since it's been such a long time since the last chapter, this chapter is super packed with lots of (hopefully) great stuff, so enjoy the read!

Part Two: We Are Searching for Significance

Chapter Seventeen: Gaining and Revealing

The cold rainy water of the ocean seemed like a sickly disease compared to be the warm roughness of the wood of Johann's ship.

They were all pulled out by Johann's strongest men, one by one until they got to Toothless. The arrows and swords immediately turned out.

"Don't worry your highness." Johann told him. "We won't let this dragon pull you down. Wrath of God, you could've been killed," he continued to ramble. "Good thing we got here when we did."

"N-No!" Hiccup yelled out, stepping between the men's weapons and Toothless till treading water nervously. "He'sâ€|.he's with me."

Johann's eyes widened. "Butâ€|young prince Hiccup."

Hiccup bit his lip. He didn't want to waste time debating or making up stories in a drizzle. He just let out a breath, sometimes things didn't have to be complicatedâ€|he just said it.

"Toothless is my friend, he won't hurt me or anyone else if you let him board the shipâ€|butâ€|you don't have to kill him."

::I don't think that's going to work.: _Toothless told him, trying to sound calm but Hiccup could feel the dragon's bones shaking and not from the chill of the wind or the water.

::Even if it doesn't I'll jump in with you, I'm not leaving you, Toothless.:

"P-prince Hiccupâ€|" Johann still continued to stutter. "When did this happen?"

"It's a long story." Hiccup sighed. "Just, let Toothless up." He commanded. Johann still treated him like royalty, and it had been a while since Hiccup had let out a good order that immediately warranted following.

Some of Johann's men still stayed armed as the others used the net to fish out Toothless and plopped him down on the deck, his wings and tail flinging around while he tried to get used to his surroundings and his broken prosthetic tangled in the netting.

_::A-are they going to?:: _Toothless stuttered but Hiccup was immediately at his side. He helped him get out of the net.

::Everything's fine. I thinkâ€|::

"Prince Hiccup." Johann said. "Is that a machine on the dragon's tail?"

"Yes, I injured him so I made a prosthetic fin to help him fly. It takes both of us to operate it." He looked over at the charred remains. "But, it's a bit busted now, so if you hadn't come along we really would've been stranded."

Johann looked over at met Alastair's eyes. She stiffened up and held Nimfir close to her.

"And who's this?" Johann asked giving Alastair a thorough onceover. "I didn't know you were that way Prince Hiccup." Johann half joked, nudging one of his men who shared in his snicker.

Hiccup just blushed. "Uh no, no, Alastair she-he'sâ€|um. We're traveling together."

"Alright well enough small talk out in this drizzle." Johann said, shielding his head from the rain with his hand. "Come below deck, we'll dry you off and get you something more substantial to wear."

0o0

Although he wasn't exactly clean Hiccup felt so much better to finally be wearing something that wasn't his Viking attire. Just being in worldly clothing made him feel a little more disconnected to his past circumstances. He snuggled into the blanket that Johann had lent him as Toothless sat behind him.

The men of the ship, though, were hardly subtle with their complete shock for the sight before them.

"So you're a prince, eh?" one of the men asked.

"Umâ€|kind of. I mean, I used to be." Hiccup's eyes darted around, looking for Alastair but she hadn't come out of the changing room yet.

"And you have this dragon all to yourself?"

"Wellâ€|yeah."

"Seems like such a southern arrangement, don't it?" the man laughed and the others followed suit. "A Viking prince treatin' a dragon like the Saxons do."

"W-what do you mean but that?" Hiccup jolted up.

:::Please don't antagonize them, they'll never shut up at this rate.::: Toothless sighed, and tried to lay down and get some sleep. But Hiccup barely paid him any heed at that point.

"What about the Anglo-Saxon's do you knowâ€¦? How do they treat the dragons in that area?"

"Just like you're treatin' yours I suppose." The man leaned back, taking a swig of ale and ran his tongue over his crocket teeth. "What kind of things have you taught it to do? " He ruffled his lips in laughter. "Fight without teeth?"

Toothless popped up at that point, growling loudly as his teeth dropped down from his gums in a slick wisp. All of the men leaned back, grouping together with a unified intake.

"Toothless can already do a lot of things, I don't have to teach him much."

"Play nice with the other kids, Hiccup." Alastair finally came out in a loose garment much like Hiccup. She sat down next to him while Nimfir scurried over her body frantically. The little dragon probably didn't enjoy being around so many new people.

"You two swing that way, huh?" The man asked, keeping his distance from Toothless but still laughing at his own jokes.

Luckily, before Hiccup started yelling at them Johann came in and called Hiccup over.

They had spoken a little while Johann was finding them clothes about Hiccup's reasoning for being there. That he needed a book translated, though Hiccup dreaded the other part of the deal. Johann said he wouldn't harbor a fugitive, his business had to remain neutral, after all, and dragons were touchy subjects when it came to different culture's views on the matter.

Hiccup entered Johann's study and laid the book down on the table.

"It's called 'The One with the Dragon Heart'" Hiccup said carefully. "We think that it's written in some kind of Oriental charactersâ€¦but I don't know anything else other than a little bit of Roman."

Johann scrutinized the pages, looking at them before talking slow steps over to his bookshelf. He pulled out three more books and laid them down next to the dragon heart book.

It was a good thirty minutes of silence before Johann finally leaned back in his chair, letting out a heave and touched Hiccup's shoulder.

"This isn't oriental or any other Eastern character, for that matter."

"Wh-what?" Hiccup's eyes went wide. "Butâ€|what else could it be?"

"I'm not sure, lad." Johann sighed. "I'm sorryâ€|but whatever book this is, it's no language I've ever seen. And I've seen quite a lot of languages."

Hiccup hummed in thought. If it wasn't Oriental than what was it? It was already a far fetch to believe that Orientals wrote a book that so closely related to Viking lore, but he hardly believed any of the southern regions wrote any of it. And if Johann couldn't translate itâ€|than who could? Being a Viking prince still didn't leave him with too many connections outside the archipelago's boundaries especially since he was a fugitive now. Johann was their only outside connection.

But thenâ€|there was his part of the deal for the translation.

"Now, out with it." Johann started. "Why are you floating out in the middle of the ocean with a boy and two dragons in tow? And does your father knowâ€|?"

Hiccup wondered how much of the truth he should've told Johann. Since he couldn't translate the book there wasn't too much of a point in telling him about whatever weird prophecy was unfolding. But as for why he had to run awayâ€|

"I have some important business to take care of."

"Where?" Johann immediately asked. "I'm surprised your father is letting you do business without an escort."

"Umâ€|well, Alastair is my escort. He's young but he's a good bodyguard."

Johann only leaned backed in his chair sucking his teeth before he exhaled. Hiccup immediately felt stupid, Johann already knew all the answers to the questions he asked.

"You've already been to Berk, haven't you?" Hiccup asked in a droll.

"I was delivering relief supplies to Merkskof, a direct request from King Stoick." Johann said. "He mentioned that you had run away and I might find you on the water. There are probably at least a dozen search parties wandering around the waters." Hiccup's eyes widened. So his father _had _sent out search parties? "King Stoick had mentioned that you took a fugitive with youâ€|that boy." Johann sighed as he continued. "Though he didn't mention the dragon oddly enough. But fancy me finding you with a night fury."

Hiccup didn't know whether to frown or smirk. Even Stoick was too ashamed to mention how his son ran off with a dragon.

"And you suddenly come to me wanting to translate a book about the Dragon Heart."

Hiccup perked up. "Y-you know something about the Dragon Heart?"

"Not especially, anyone who knows about it makes it more as a manuscript type tale, or a just a bedtime story. Thoughâ€" he closed the book and pushed it back to Hiccup. "â€"I do know of a man who seemed obsessed with learning more about this particular lore."

"Who?"

"His name is Gobber. Well traveled man, has his own boat and a crew, last time we connected was down in the Saxons."

"Do you think he can translate this?" Hiccup felt it right to ask. Though he shuddered at the thought of asking a foreigner for help on such a sensitive topic, if this man really was an expert, he might have a lead on who the dragon heart was, and perhaps even what his own powers meant.

"If anyone can, Gobber can." Johann sighed. "Though it's near impossible to find the chap sometimes." He rubbed his temples. "And I promised your father that once I found you I'd bring you back home."

"No!" Hiccup immediately stood. "I'm not going back home Iâ€|my place just isn't on that island anymore. I messed up too much to go back there with any dignity as heir to the throne."

"Prince Hiccupâ€|"

"Please Johann, just take me to the Saxon landmass, I'll take it from there. But if you bring me back home I'll jump ship even if Toothless has a broken tail. I won't go back there and jeopardize my mission."

Johann was quiet for a good, long while. He chewed his cheek, eyes darting around the room slowly though never meeting Hiccup's gaze until he let out a hissy exhale.

"Only if you write your father, the King's worried sick."

"I-I can't" Hiccup looked down at his shoes.

"Then no deal."

"Johann!"

"Just tell him you're alive and well and that you'll be home soon." Johann closed his eyes. "Even if it's a lie, just give him some peace of mind."

Hiccup kept his eyes locked on his boots, tattered from just a little over a week of wandering. His skin sticky and dry and the clothes he wore loose and kind of scratchy. He was hardly what his father would define as 'okay', but he was alive.

He let out a defeated breath when he thought back to Alastair, how much her mother might've benefited from simply knowing her daughter was okay.

"Fineâ€|" Hiccup said quietly.

"Alright, you write your letter, and I'll send letters around to locate Gobber." Johann stood as well, patting Hiccup on the shoulder as he moved towards the door. "And Prince Hiccup?"

"Yeah?"

"I hope you know that running away never solves your problems. Going off with a dashing boy and a night fury to search for some lore might seem exciting at first but I think it's best to think about what you're getting into. You don't have to do this!"

Hiccup let out a laugh, almost bitterly so. "You say it like I really have a choice to be this way."

0o0

They'd be out of the archipelago and to open sea in a matter of two days. And for those two days Astrid felt sick to her stomach. It reminded her of her days on the recruiting ship back when she first left Merkskof almost two months ago.

The winter air was coming in quickly even though they were heading steadily south but the thin leftover clothes and some blankets were all Johann could afford them.

Astrid hated the strange looks she'd get as she lazed away on the ship. She only had a loose tunic and some leggings, but with her hair growing slowly back out and the suggestiveness of the tunic continually hanging off her shoulder no matter how many times she lifted it back up the men all still stared.

Though it wasn't really a perverted look they gave her, just more like they wanted to know what her deal was. She was a fugitive boy traveling with a banished prince, after all. That was already enough to raise eyebrows. And she was sick to death of people asking her if she 'swung that way'.

For the majority of the two days Hiccup and Toothless were busy trying to make amends with the limited smithy that Johann had which was more like a simple pit of fire that blew out every five minutes to rebuild Toothless's tail. The night fury was getting tired of not flying.

Nimfir stayed carefully by Astrid's side, as always. Curling in her shirt, sneezing, and hissing at the new people that he didn't particularly care for. Though when he wasn't in her shirt, he was gnawing on wood. His teeth were coming in, much to Johann's distaste for his ship slowly growing more and more bite marks all over the place.

Right when they were at the borders of Viking territory, though, they were met with a scouting ship making its way back the way they had come. And as customary shipman's etiquette, ships stopped and talked to each other when on friendly terms.

Both Hiccup and Astrid had to stay inside, as word of Johann harboring any extra passengers that even looked like the young prince and the fugitive boy was going to get his boat hauled right back to the royal isle.

"Top of the morning, lads." Johann said in his usual chipper wit as Hiccup, Astrid, and Toothless listened from below deck.

"They're just taking about scouting missions and stuff." Hiccup said as he pressed his ear as closely to the wooden hatch as he could. Astrid wanted to push him further for she doubted he could hear anything clearly but she didn't want him getting splinters in his ears.

"Anything useful?" Astrid asked.

"Well other than the search party my dad let out making another round around the archipelagoâ€| just something about more scouts going missing."

"Scouts?" Astrid sat up a bit

"Yeahâ€|only three though, butâ€|" Hiccup turned and sat on the stairs leading to the hatch door. He frowned, looking as if he didn't know what to say.

"What is it?" Astrid pressed.

"Wellâ€|didn't you tell me once that you had a friend named Rune who went out on a scouting mission?"

Astrid's eyes widened while he heart sank back. She had just begun to deal with her mother and nowâ€|Ruffnut was missing as well? Was she even able to find Tuffnut she wondered, or where they both absolute failures at what they had originally left Merkskof to do?

Hiccup must've seen the turmoil dance over her face for he reached out and simply placed a hand on her shoulder, and Toothless placed his nose against her back while Nimfir just clung to her chest.

"Alastair." Hiccup began but Astrid simply wasn't in the mood to hear anything at that point. Her heart swelled at the amount of care they all had for her. And to be comforted so kindly by the Viking Prince and two dragons was always going to make her feel like she was trapped in a surreal reality, but she stood, cradling Nimfir against her.

"Nimfir needs his napâ€|and, I'm gonna sleep too." She said.

"Um, alright," Hiccup frowned. "Just tell us if you need anything."

"Yeahâ€|"

She went up to the hammock she slept in. It wasn't entirely comfortable, but the ship was filled with twelve other men and now two dragons. Still, as she hung there she was thankful that her mind slowed from her constant thoughts of failure and memories back on Merkskof.

Nimfir fell asleep on her chest and soon her own eyes closedâ€|

0o0

Astrid hadn't even realized she shook in her sleep until Hiccup's voice pulled her back into consciousness. He had gotten in her high suspended hammock, gently trying to wake her up.

"Hiccup!" She yelped and jolted back up. "What are you doing in my hammock, I told you I was fine!"

"Nimfir came and got me, you were shaking so I guess you worried him." Hiccup said with a sigh, leaning back on the other side of the hammock. His boots were too close to her face, but then hers were probably too close to his at that point as well. "And, you know, shaking in your sleep is a sure sign that you're most definitely not fine."

"Hiccup, I just don't want to make a dramatic deal about another disaster in my life." Astrid buried her head in her hands. "For all I know, Ruffnut might've found her brother and she might just be lost in the Saxons somewhereâ€" "

"Ruffnut?" Hiccup raised a brow. "I thought your friends name was Rune?"

Astrid's eyes bugged from in between her fingers and she bit her lip. She forgot how careful with her names she s_till had to be even outside of Berk, even when she was still alone with Hiccup, she still had to guard her lies. Her and Ruffnut's lies.

"Umâ€|"

"Alastairâ€|" Hiccup sat up a little and reached out for her but she leaned back, trying not to do so in an abrupt manner so the hammock would turn over. Hiccup was becoming moreâ€|touchy lately. She liked to have thought it was because he was sympathetic towards her situation as of late but it left her with an uncertainty of what to do. She still didn't know if he knew what she was yet.

He sucked his teeth then.

"Stillâ€|" he muttered.

"What?"

"You're still keeping secrets from me, Alastair!?" Hiccup said loudly, looking as if he immediately regretted it afterwards. His eyes widened and he leaned back in the hammock. "I-I'm sorryâ€|I shouldn't be bringing this up now, Iâ€|" he got up again, swinging his legs over the side of the hammock.

Astrid's hands bunched in the netting. Nowâ€|now was the perfect time, but her stupid mouth wouldn't open. She could only will her muscles to move in her favor, and luckily she grabbed his hand before he jumped down from the hammock.

"Wait," she said quietly.

"Alastair, we don't have to talk about this now. Not when all of this stuff is happening to youâ€|I won't do that to youâ€|" Hiccup said

just as quietly, though Astrid couldn't meet his eyes. She knew they'd be serious and genuine, she couldn't handle it.

"N-no butâ€|" she tried to form sentences. "Hiccupâ€|" She kept squeezing his hand, like he was trying to leave, but Hiccup stayed in place, simply looking at her.

"Rune and Ruffnut are the same personâ€|she left me with from Merkskof. Rune is her boy name." She mentally slapped herself. So she had enough nerve to reveal her friend's secret but not her own?

"So I'm guessing she cut her hair, passed herself off as a boy and joined the warriors to find her brother?" Hiccup said, finally turning his gaze out to the wall on their left. There was a squint in his eyes and it made Astrid nervous. She didn't know whether he was mad or just thinking.

Astrid just kept silent.

"Like youâ€|?" Hiccup finally blurted out. He chewed his cheek nervously, like saying it was a gamble for _him. _But Astrid's stomach dropped entirely. She was surprised the hammock didn't break at the weight.

In one swift movement Astrid let go of his hand and swung her legs over to jump from the hammock, but the netting began to swing.

"Alastair, stop!" Hiccup said loudly and stilled her movements before she saw that his face was completely red, it stopped her fidgeting, but not her heart from thudding against her ribs painfully.

It's not like she hadn't expected him to already know, there was a very good chance of it. But now the conversation was finally here. She could lay all of her cards out on the table and drop her guard for him. Instead she just kept silent, crossing her feet in the hammock and playing with her hands. The more the silence lingered, the harder it would be for her to say something. She knew that, but Astrid just continued playing with her hands.

Until Hiccup reached out and placed a hand over her fidgeting ones. He wasn't looking at her, the squinted look of his placed back at the wall.

"Justâ€|" he started. "Alastair's not your real name, is it?"

Astrid shook her head, not able to say "no" audibly.

A sigh dropped down Hiccup's throat and the light swinging tug of the hammock netting bunched and stretched for minutes on end while they both sat there.

The only comfort Astrid got was feeling Hiccup's palm sweat as it rested over hers. Then at least she knew that he was nervous as well.

Astrid could've just told him "yes my name isn't Alastair, it's Astrid" and end the conversation there, but her not saying so wasn't even as much for the lack of wanting to, or even knowing how. As Astrid thought of every possible way to say that what her real name

was, all she could do was find out how much her old name wasn't who she was anymore.

Astrid was a girl on Merkskof. Forced into attractive clothing, making bread with Ruffnut, and secretly practicing fighting skills with her brother in the woods.

But Alastair, Alastair was a confused orphan boy who was thrust into a destiny alongside a Viking Prince and a Night Fury.

Even if Astrid didn't know completely who Alastair was yet, she was more Alastair than Astrid.

"Alastair!" Hiccup's voice finally broke her thoughts. She made the mistake of reacting on impulse and looking up at him. His gaze was on her then, eyes dead serious and genuine just as she had feared. His lips pursed just like they always did, creating little puff in his cheek and defined circles about his eyes.

"I knowâ€œ" Astrid started but had to take a deep breath before continuing. "I know that you're going to be mad at me, but my real name isn't important."

"Alastair," Hiccup's shoulders sagged.

"Hiccup, who I was back there on Merkskof, that's not who I am anymore. I'm not her anymore." Her heartbeat rose, but so did her confidence. "Who I am is Alastair. Who I am is with you and Toothless and Nimfir. There's no point in knowing who I was, because I'm never going to be her again."

"It's not about that." Hiccup turned away, sadly. "It's about there being no more secrets between us. Butâ€œ" Astrid looked up, he was looking at her again, studying her. "I'm glad you told me this much, Alastair."

He smiled at her. It was a smile Astrid hadn't seen before, it radiated gratitude and she couldn't help but return it.

Hiccup's eyes eventually fell down to their hands and he immediately ripped his away from her.

"Ah, um, sorry." He scratched the back of his neck. "It'll take a little getting used to. The whole gender switch thing."

Astrid let out a laugh, a good, hearty one that filled her stomach and lungs with much needed fresh air, even in the stuffy sleeping quarters.

"I'll bet." She giggled.

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They all choose to eat dinner alone that night, Alastair and Nimfir stayed at their hammock, lost in thought. But Hiccup figured he had bothered her enough for the day.

_:::I'm glad you two have finally worked things out.::: _Toothless said as he and Hiccup ate near the smithy. The slow burn too much longer to prepare the metal for proper bending. But while they ate Hiccup

went over the day, and flipped through the dragon heart book what must've been the millionth time.

:::For the most part, there's still the question of her name butâ€": Hiccup chewed _:::I'll just take what I can get for now." _Hiccup looked out the door, thoughtfully. _:::She's going through so much now that she knows about her friend being missingâ€":_

_:::The south isn't the same environment as here, for humans or dragons.::: _Toothless said. _:::I hope her friend isn't lost there.:::

_:::What do you know about the south, Toothless?::: _Hiccup closed the book for a moment, turned to face the night fury. The fire flickered over his eyes while the dragon thought, letting out a low growl.

_:::There's no war there. Not the kind of war that's here, anyways.::: _Toothless started and Hiccup smiled at the thought. The crewmen had mentioned that he and Toothless had a bond that was more like the Saxons had with their dragons. _:::The hierarchy of the empire is very corrupt, though.:::

_:::The hierarchy?::: _Hiccup asked. _:::You mean the Saxon King?:::

_:::No, the Holy Empire.:::

Hiccup blinked. Toothless clearly didn't know much about the human fixings of the south, but he knew the Roman empire's title.

_:::The Romans are our allies.::: _Hiccup looked down, opening the book again. _:::They helped advance the Viking culture long before my time, but we've been mending some fences ever since the Griggs had a separate party go and assassinate King Oswald.:::

_:::Yes, I know of that.::: _

Hiccup blinked again. _:::You do? Then you know about the new King, Dagur? He's aâ€|well, he's interesting, to say the least. My father was going to send me there, you know.:::

Toothless sat up then. _:::Don't get involved with them.::: _Toothless told him, very sternly. _:::Nothing good can come from it.:::

Hiccup sighed and turned back around, leaning against Toothless's warmth and opening the dragon heart book. Toothless was hiding thingsâ€|again.

_:::You know, between you and Alastair I'm going to lose my mind with all of these secrets.:::

:::I already told you it's not that I'm keeping things from you because I like to. It'sâ€":

_:::It's because there's certain things I don't need to know right now, I know, I know.::: _Hiccup recited drolly. _:::Do you remember that dream I had?:::

_:::The girl with the glowing chest?:::

:::Yes.:::

Hiccup flopped through the book again, stopping on the page with Yggdrasil. _:::I've been thinking that maybe we can try experimenting with our powers.:::_

:::I have no powers, you do.:::

:::Okay, well my powers and yourâ€|night fury-ness.:::

Toothless gave him a dry look and Hiccup offered him a sheepish grin.

:::What did you have in mind?:::

:::We can try and link our minds and have a dream, I'm sure with your background and my powers we can come up with something a little more substantial to go off of with this dragon heart thing.:::

Toothless still didn't look convinced.

:::It's worth a shot, Toothless, come on.:::

:::I don't know if I want you that close to my thoughts.:::

:::I can read your mind, Toothless, how much closer can we be?:::
Hiccup scooted a little closer to the dragon, snuggling into the nook between his arm and side. _:::Please,::: _he sang.

:::For a few minutes.:::

Hiccup kept the closeness as he smiled, keeping the book on that page and focusing on the last dream he had, his bond with Toothless. He connected them together and let the channels within his mind ignite and spark.

His mind blanked before fading to white, the blinding light of a sun setting over a wide expanse of water filling his field. There was a stillness as he watched the sun set from the same tree in his previous dream.

"Excuse me sir." Hiccup heard a voice, and hawk flew up next to him and sat on a tree branch. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm not sure, I think I'm dreaming." Hiccup looked around, searching for Toothless. "Have you seen a night fury anywhere?"

"Oh, he's probably at the very top." The hawk looked up, the tree branches continuing to ascend into the clouds. "The portal is about to open, after all."

"What portal?"

The hawk let out a squawk of a laugh. "What _are _you doing here again, human?"

"I told youâ€|I'm dreaming." Hiccup looked down, his feet dangling over a long fall into the water. "But, I'm trying to find out more about the dragon heart."

"Ah, the dragon heart. The valiant savoir of the humansâ€|my rider, naturally."

"Your rider, huh? So then you must know where she is!?"

"Oh no, not yet, but I wait for the day where they will take to my back and we fly together to defeat and slay Nidhogg."

"Well, when is Nidhogg coming? Do you know?"

"Everyone knows, silly human." The hawk spread its wings, preparing to take off. "Ragnarok."

Hiccup's eyes widened before the hawk flew away, it's gust spreading a chill that left ice over the entire tree. The bark beneath him froze instantly, and the weight of the tree caused the ice to crack chip by chip. The slow creaking making Hiccup twitch before a stronger gust of chilling wind blew over him, knocking the fragile tree over.

Toothless appeared in the debris of icebergs and icy tornados and Hiccup scrambled over to him, reaching out despite the frost gathering at his finger tips.

"Toothless, follow the sound of my voice!" He called out as the ground began to shake. The sun poked out of the hazy clouds, Toothless's silhouette a beautiful sight before it was broken in a flash of light, and Nidhogg came out of the night fury, splitting Toothless in two.

"No!" Hiccup jolted up, feeling a warm and wet nose at his back and Toothless claws lightly grasping his leg.

His heart raced and his body sweated as he looked over at the night fury, touching his scaly skin to make sure he wasn't split in two. But Toothless was fine, and they were make in Johann's makeshift smithy.

_:::That's enough of that.::: _Toothless said. _:::I knew you'd see something you didn't want to.:::_

:::I-I don't understandâ€|why were you..and the treeâ€|and who was that hawkâ€|and-!?::

Toothless nudged Hiccup a little harder.

_:::Calm yourself.::: _Toothless told him. _:::Let your mind simmer before you try and make any sense of it.:::_

_:::T-Toothless why were you-?::: _Hiccup didn't listen.

:::Don't ask me.:::

_:::Well I'm asking.::: _Hiccup stood, going over the smithy's fire pit and grabbing the clutch. He pulled the rod from the fire and stared at Toothless with a challenge in his eyes. _:::Either you start explaining what all this means or you'll never fly again.:::_

Toothless glared, growling and biting his claws into the wood of the ship. The sound made was enough to make a grown man tremble, but Hiccup stood his ground.

::Talk. Hiccup repeated. _::What are you, Toothless? For real this time, what's your connection to Nidhogg?::_ Hiccup glared for a moment, but his hard eyes fell, fear and sadness filling the glower more than anything else. _::Or are you Nidhogg?::_

::Iâ€|:: Toothless began. He sat but it was an uneasy rest. His claws still gnawed into the wood below him and his eyes wouldn't meet Hiccup's. _::I was created for one purpose, and that's to assist my father's coming._

::Coming to what?:: Hiccup still tried to sound intimidating, threatening. But his voice was a tremble instead.

::Ragnarok. Toothless looked up pitifully, his eyes wide and glossed over, the peaks of fear Hiccup had always sense were spiking, a shame within the night fury's heart and a saddened. voice telling the dragon that Hiccup would never accept him.

The dragon heart was supposed to defeat Nidhogg, and Toothless was created to assist Nidhogg.

Hiccup sat down, letting the hot metal clank and steam on the ground while both he and Toothless looked down in shock.

Hiccup was on a mission find the dragon heart. The one who would save the world from Ragnarok.

The one who would kill Nidhogg and Toothless to do so.

**Well that's a good place to stop. **

**A lot stuff went down, just like a promised, right? **

**The next chapter is a tad more leisurely, so after all this "major plot" stuff in this chapter we can relax a little. **

**And since the last chapter update was such a long time ago, I'm going to skip the review responses this time, they will resume with the next chapter. **

But thank you all for the lovely words and the great dedication to the story thus far! And next chapter will be updated on the 1**st**** June. **

**Next chapter: Restarted and Rethought **

18. Restarted and Rethought

Yay! No seriously long break this time around! We're in a new location and everything so let's just dive right in, shall we?

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter Eighteen: Restarted and Rethought

Astrid dumped her lunch into the salt water as she did almost every day in the four weeks she had been trapped on Trader Johann's ship.

Leaving the Archipelago seemed to take no time compared to the weeks they were stuck out at sea before even seeing a glimpse of the Anglo Saxon mainland on the horizon. The midpoint port that Johann always stopped atâ€"so he claimedâ€"in his go-rounds was the nearest trading city on the northern tip of the mainland, Durham. But it was a neutral port, and the Bishops had exclusives orders:

Only Johann and the first shipman stepped off the ship to conduct business, and they could only stay on port for one night.

Astrid, Hiccup, and Toothless all quivered at the stop at Durham, knowing their next stop was a week away and yet they were so close to just setting one foot on solid land.

"For sea fairing people you don't really have your sea legs, do ya?" the shipman would joke, but it was Toothless and Hiccup that were laughing when Astridâ€"thoroughly fed up and just having thrown up another lunchâ€"punched them in the noses.

Humber, on the other hand, was a different story. While not a major trading city, Humber was the last good trading sport in Northern Anglo Saxon before Johann planned to venture the crew to the southern crowned jewel of trading: Lincoln.

Still a week in Humber was prime sale for Johann, and, more importantly, it meant that all the shipman were able to come off the ship.

"Okay so that's two new pairs of shoes for the both of you, a definite change of clothes, coats, andâ€¦" Johann looked at Toothless who pitifully nudged towards his tail. "Metal to finish Toothless's tail, yes?"

"That seems to be about it, sir." Astrid looked at the list she made Hiccup write up when she realized he was just going to wing it in the markets as for what they all needed. "I'm sorry about the extra cost."

"No heed, lad."

"You can skip my extra pair of shoes if the metal for Toothless costs too much." Hiccup offered, but Astrid sent him a glare.

"As heavy an instep you have, you're going to need five pairs of shoes." Astrid said, taking Hiccup by the collar.

"And I'd get the shoes first." Johann looked down at them. Astrid shoe's were on their last legs while Hiccup had to discard his rundown boots a week ago. "Can't have you walking around barefoot, Prince Hiccup."

Astrid saw Hiccup wince at the title, but Johann stuck to his morals of being in respect around royalty.

Johann handed them a pouch of coins which would suffice for their

expenses and a little extra for any "personal goodies", so Johann called them.

A leash was offered to them, standard dragon leash that he picked up for high price in Durham. Hiccup had spent the last few days on the ship learning how to tie it properly and Toothless to get used to it.

Because in Anglo Saxon territory, Dragons were slaves.

Such "beasts" were only allowed in the area if having proper registration and was kept on a leash in public areas.

Astrid held Toothless steady as the night fury fidgeted while Hiccup secured the binding. Metal neck brace, and a leather tie-up to keep the wings constricted. Hiccup attached to end of the leash to the rolling barrel and sighed.

"I know, bud." He gave Toothless's side a pat.

"It's only while we're in the markets." Astrid tried to comfort as well, even Nimfir had to wear a leash, though a lot less bulky because of his size. It still broke Astrid's heart to have to carry the little guy around on her shoulder all bound up like a criminal, making extra sure that she packed the registration Johann spent hours in Durham getting for them in her bag.

The small paper was enough that if they were stopped they could show the officials that their dragon was, indeed, registered. Though Astrid eyed the dragon classification with little hope that anyone would really buy that Toothless was a rare-type grapple grounder.

"All of this just to get some supplies, huh?" Hiccup scoffed.

"I know," Astrid agreed

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The market of Humber was much more packed than they were used to on Berk. People all around selling small bee farms for honey and mead, cow horn cups, and "special wild birds that were sure to produce even finer eggs than that of a chicken or a geese".

"Ah, you look like you need a comb young man, I have them from as many antlers as you can imagine." Astrid was told by a man at a cart. She touched her hair, seeing that it was well past time for a cut. It was a good thing she told Hiccup she was a girl when she did, because having hair as unruly and long as she did then made it hard to convince anyone in close contact that she was really male, despite her masculine clothing.

"No thank you." Astrid shook her head and kept moving a little faster to keep behind Hiccup. Her English was still shaky even after using all of the weeks she was on the ship studying up on it. The bi-lingual shipman were quite helpfulâ€"at least in that respectâ€"but she didn't pick it up as easily as Hiccup did, who was speaking it as if it were his natural language already.

"Excuse me, ma'am," Hiccup asked a women who had just left a shop.

"Do you know a good place to get footwear," he gestured down to his bare feet. "As you can see I'm a little lacking."

Astrid shook her head fondly as she woman rattled off too quickly for Astrid to follow but Hiccup got every word of it and thanked her.

"He's something else, isn't he Toothless?" Astrid looked at the dragon, but Toothless had been rather to himself for weeks. She sensed something was amiss between him and Hiccup, but neither would let on what it was.

Once they got the shoe fitter he gave Hiccup was already fed up with shopping as it seemed to take forever for them to readjust the head of the shoe to fit Hiccup's "rather small feet" as the salesman called them. And since Hiccup was taking longer, Astrid went to go get their clothes herself as Hiccup declared he didn't care what he wore as long as it was comfortable.

"And you're the girl, after all," Hiccup added. That earned him a slap on the backside of his head, but in reality Astrid didn't really mind. Picking his clothes did mean she got choose things that she figured Hiccup would look good in.

She took Toothless with her, as Hiccup suggested he get all the fresh air he could after being cooped up on a ship for a month, even if he was still on a leash.

Astrid got him three tunics, two leggings, a fur coat, and neck sash since she found him sneezing from the oncoming winter on more than one occasion on the ship. Hiccup would always say he was fine, but his neck was usually red right down to the freckles.

"Better get twoâ€|" Astrid decided.

"And for you?" the salesman asked, giving her a good once over. "You have such plain clothes for a pretty face."

Astrid wincedâ€|a little worried at how she had gotten mixed results that day in what people assumed she was. Some people took to her clothes and just assumed she was a boy despite her feminine face, and others couldn't get past it and assumed despite her clothes that she was still a girl.

"Umâ€|" Astrid looked around. It was the turning point. She didn't have to dress like a boy anymore, of course. Some of the shipman had already made the logical conclusion as to what was going on, and Astrid still wasn't sure if Johann called her "lad" out of courtesy or confusion. Still, was she really ready to get back in a dress again? To be hit on by men and assumed to act "lady-like?"

"I'll take three tunics myself, but make them a size bigger, please, I like to wear my clothesâ€|how do you sayâ€|um, loose?"

"Very well." The man sighed.

"Oh and a pair of spring scissors, please." She asked, tugging at her hair.

"Almost done, lad." The shoe salesman said as Hiccup sat there. He regretted having Alastair take Toothless with her, but it wasn't like the night fury would have a conversation with him anyways. Their communication had been pretty dry since the dream Hiccup had, though he could tell it wasn't on a count of anger.

Toothless was afraid. But he wouldn't pay attention long enough for Hiccup to tell him that he had nothing to worry about.

Not to say that the dream didn't have him a little shaken. Finding out what Toothless's purpose was, that the Ragnarok he had read about in more books than he could count really was coming. It seemed like all the odds were against their friendship, but Hiccup bit down in his stubbornness and decided he didn't care. It was a quick and easy decision to make but it pained him to realize that Toothless was just about as stubborn as he was, and a lot more prone to putting himself down than even Hiccup realized.

He knew that the fact of entering Anglo Saxon didn't help. Dragons in the southern region were slaves apparently. In olden days, the south fought battles against the dragons just as the north did, but the southern regions provided stronger militaries as well as more land to access in battle than out in the Archipelago.

The Bishops and religious leaders had always viewed dragons as devils sent down to earth in exile, but ever since Oswald went into Roman power captured dragons were put to what they called "better use."

Dragons were something to be trained to work, to be sold as commonly as a cow, and were to be registered and bound if taken into any public domain. Flight restrictions were common, as well as dragons of no useful skill or good meat being immediately put to death. They were not free, they were not even pets—they were livestock.

"Hiccup, you're still not finished?" Alastair came in, dropping the clothes on his head. "You and your small feet, honestly!"

"Hey don't yell at me, the sales guy is the one who's taking forever." Hiccup grumped in Norse so the salesman wouldn't understand him. He took the clothes off of his head. "And why'd you get me all these clothes I thought we agreed on just an extra set so we could afford the metal?"

"The prices were a little cheaper, and while it's still early winter you can wear these neck sashes to keep yourself warm." Alastair said, same motherly tone as always as she was already wrapping one around Hiccup's neck.

"I'll be fine." Hiccup rolled his eyes, but Alastair glared at him until it made him uncomfortable and he wasn't in the mood to argue in public. "I mean I'll be fine in these neck sashes!" thank you, Alastair." He bowed his head mockingly before giving a look at Alastair's clothes. "And what's with what you brought?"

Alastair looked down at her clothes, raising a brow. Hiccup tugged her a little closer.

"I thought you'd knowâ€œ" Hiccup whispered. "Maybe try wearing a dress or something?" Hiccup didn't want to admit that the only little bright spot he found in spending a day shopping was perhaps getting to see Alastair in a dress now that he knew for certain that she was a girl. And with them not on Berk anymore the possibility seemed pretty high.

His words were only met with a red-faced Alastair, though.

"I prefer to dress like this," she said quietly. "It's comfortable."

Hiccup couldn't argue there. But he couldn't really hide that he was upset about it.

"But I did get something cool." She said as she sat down beside him. Nimfir scurried as best he could down into Alastair's lap with his arms and wings restricted but Hiccup took him out of his misery and held him instead.

Hiccup looked behind as Toothless stood a little ways away from them, his mind still closed off but Hiccup felt the leaks of self pity peaking through the cracks.

Then he felt a book flop into his lap.

"Alastair's Many Adventures." Hiccup read aloud. "What's this?"

"One of the few English books that was brought to the Archipelago and translated to Norse." Alastair explained. "Me and Atlas used to read this book all the time, it was one of the few we had. Alastair was an epic traveler and a fierce warrior. He took on more monsters than you could count, his stories were legendaryâ€œ!"

Hiccup saw Alastair's eyes light up as she regaled the past, so he turned his full attention to her, though her face instantly dropped.

"But I guess the book back home is gone nowâ€œ!" She looked over at the book in Hiccup's lap, touching the pages fondly. Hiccup closed a hand over hers.

"Well, hey, now you have another copy. It might not be in Norse but it's better than nothing, right?" He was thrilled when that made her smile.

"But the real reason I'm showing this to you," she continued, "is because you do need to think of a cover name now that we'll be in the south for a while." Hiccup sighed, not having thought of that one. While not everyone in the south knew of the royal names of the Archipelago, it was better safe than sorry amongst those who did know of King's Stoick's sonâ€œ! the odd and currently missing Prince Hiccup.

"It would have to be a decent English name." Hiccup thought aloud, trying to think of a few on the spot, but none really rolled off his tongue as something he'd want to introduce himself as.

Alastair flipped a few pages in the book, pointing to a word on the page. Hiccup squinted at it. "Albar." he said slowly. It wouldn't be

his first choice, but it wasn't horrible either.

"Albar was Alastair's traveling companion. They were brothers, but they were also best friends, had each other's backs no matter what." She smiled at him again. "I thought it would suit you since I named myself after Alastairâ€|"

"So would that make you a brother or a sister?" Hiccup laughed a little, earning him another slap on the head. "Alright, alright." Hiccup laughed. He really didn't need any more convincing. "Albar it is."

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It was another half hour before Hiccup's shoes were ready and he was well spent from the day already.

The afternoon was becoming late at that point, and Hiccup and Alastair took Toothless and Nimfir back to the ship so they could stretch their wings.

Hiccup looked at the metal they had gotten on the way back from the shoe shop, it would be more than enough to finish the job since they had run out of the needed supplies about halfway to Durham. But because of the nature of what he was building, Hiccup figured it would be best to still build it in Johann's makeshift smithy rather than do it at the local one.

:::Just another day or two and it'll be finished, Toothless.
_Hiccup said happily but the night fury only responded with a nod.
_:::Come on Toothless!::: _Hiccup let out a great sigh. _:::How much longer are you going to be like this?::: _His tone softened, placing a steady hand on Toothless's side. _:::Can we at least talk about this?:::_

:::There's nothing to talk about, it'll only make it worse.

_:::Toothless!::: _Hiccup grabbed the side of the dragon's face, looking him dead in the eyes, and he caught every bit of sadness that flickered along the lines of his eyes. Hiccup slowly let go, dropping to the floor in a defeated heap.

:::I keep telling you...I'm not going to kill you. I'm not going to let anyone kill you.
_Hiccup told him, for what seemed like the 50th time. Toothless didn't respond, at least, not in any way that Hiccup could tell.

He stood, walking out to the deck to let the salt water of the port blow through his mind. The sun was setting over the Humber then. Lanterns and fires being cast as the yellows and pinks in the sky faded to milky purples. The town was just as lively at night as it was during the day. Johann had mentioned Lincoln having similar entertainment to Berk. Late night games, plays, puppet shows. But Humber was a much quainter town, only having local bonfires that served as a main source of congregation. Still, it meant good food and probably some music.

Hiccup squinted at the sight before him, suddenly in a grave need of some relaxing time.

"Thinking about hitting the town, huh?" He had Alastair asked as she walked by, scissors in hand. She had already adjusted well to her new clothes, which were similar to his aside from being looser, more so than not to hide her figure which Hiccup still frowned at not getting to see in the proper clothing of her true gender. He looked down at the knife in her hand.

"Do I wanna know what you're going to do with that?"

"Cut my hair of course," she laughed. "It's getting a little too long, I think I confused the townspeople as to what I was this afternoon."

Hiccup stared at her for a good moment or two, eyeing her hair and deciding that while he actually liked it longer he wouldn't stop her from cutting it. He turned back to the water with a frown in his sigh.

"And what's your problem?"

"Nothing just Toothless is getting on my nerves, he's being so stubborn, he won't even talk to me!"

"You ever gonna tell me what's going on?" she asked.

"I'll tell you when I have an idea of what's going on!" Hiccup groaned and flopped his head down on the ledge, banging it repeatedly though lightly. He felt a hand at his back.

"I think we both need a break from this ship for the evening, don't you?"

Hiccup looked up from the wood and smirked, delighted and more than a bit smug at her blush when he asked "are you asking me out on a date, Alastair?"

"Uh-umâ€|well no, I mean, I don't have to go with you I was justâ€""

"Calm down, I was only teasing," Hiccup said, leaning back on the ledge. The tease wasn't that farfetched, though. He still hadn't forgotten about her kissing him back on Berk, even under the circumstances.

"But," he continued, "an evening out does sound good. And there are supposed to be bonfires here in the evenings." He smiled at her. "It would be like old times." Hiccup said, speaking as if 'old times' were longer than just the few months ago they actually were.

"Alright then, you and me tonight." Alastair returned the grin and as Hiccup looked at her again a wicked yet perfect thought entered his mind.

"Thoughâ€|on one condition." He said.

"A condition?" Alastair repeated, dumbfounded and already sounding annoyed. "Of what?"

Hiccup tried not to laugh as he offered an answer. "You have to wear a dress." He chuckled.

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Hiccup touched his hair as they walked, it was probably still a little damp from when Astrid pushed him off the ledge and into the water. A chilled breeze blew under Astrid's nose, and the smelled of the sea water in his hair caught her attention. The winter chill probably wasn't helping his hair dry any faster either.

"It wasn't really that bad of a request you know." Hiccup still complained. "You didn't have to push me into the water."

"Don't get carried away, Prince Hiccup." She said, watching his cringe at the title as punishment. "We both agreed that you knowing that I'm a girl wouldn't change anything."

"I know but can you blame me?" He smirked at her. "It's an interesting thought."

Astrid tried her best not to blush. She knew he'd be a little friskier with her now that he knew she was a girl. The Prince was used to charming girls back on the Royal Isle. The "well you're the girl" comments hadn't ceased after the initial week's post-finding out awkwardness faded, but then, being stuffed on a ship for a month either left forced comfort with the situation or nauseating awkwardness. They both chose the former.

Still, she wondered what would happen if she entertained his teasing, even for a moment. Was he really interested now that she was a girl or was he just picking at her for obvious reasons? She had come to terms with her being Hiccup's traveling companion, his friend, even going as far to say his family. It was far greater a bond than any fleeting romance she wished to foolishly pursue.

But still, she thought as she looked at him—a peak of his red neck still showing under his neck sash, and damp hair still shining under the fire light of the market as they approached the fire—it was hard not to entertain the idea of trying something. Anything now that her secret was out in the open.

The bonfire was as promised, a huge group of people. Some in their little circles, talking to themselves, some serving food at private stands or just on blankets in the grass, others were dancing around the fire in circles to the music that played happily over the flames.

Hiccup got them both some honey mead and he drank it slowly as he stared at the fire and the music that danced over it. His throat kept bouncing with each swallow he took and Astrid had to remind herself not to get caught up.

Still, he was quiet, deep in thought more so than taking it easy like they had planned.

The music in the background slowed to a different beat and everyone couples off, all spinning and hopping in unison. Astrid didn't know the dance, but watching the couples twirl made her wish that she had given in and wore a dress so her and Hiccup could've danced.

"You wanna be out there?" Hiccup asked, as if reading her thoughts.

"Who me? Umâ€|well." Astrid reached to twirled at her hair, only to find that the hair that used to bunch at her neck was freshly cut as she did so before they left.

"Why don't you go find a girl to dance with." Hiccup laughed to himself, taking another swig of mead. "Since you insist on being a boy and all."

"It's not like I enjoy being a boy that much, I just don't like how women are treated." Astrid crossed her arms. "I'd love to just be what I am if the world was a little different."

"You and me both." Hiccup said thoughtfully, still not looking at her. His eyes were out to the fire, red dancing over the green in them so beautifully Astrid's mouth ran dry. She took another drink and then stood, holding out her hands.

"Then let's dance." Astrid offered.

"Oh but Alastair, what would people think?" Hiccup said, throwing a hand over his forehead dramatically. She laughed a little and grabbed his hand, pulling in to the fire and trying her best to keep up with the steps.

"These English dances are soâ€|"

"Interesting." Hiccup completed.

"Not the word I would've gone with, but sure."

They were already getting more than their fair share of looks from people as they saw two boys dancing around a bonfire of couples, but Astrid simply focused on Hiccup, and how that faraway look remained within him.

"It's about Toothless, right?" Astrid asked and Hiccup cut his eyes to her, squeezing reflexively at her side and she jumped a little.

"Yeahâ€|" Hiccup looked down at his feet and the two fell into a slow rhythm together. Astrid kept quiet, waiting patiently for the explanation she knew Hiccup was formulating within his mind, and when she saw his mouth open even at the slightest, she gave him her full attention trying to focus on anything other than getting swept away in having his hands on her.

"Toothless is supposed to be a part of Ragnarok." Hiccup said, and it was virtually the last thing Astrid expected him to say. She stopped the dance altogether, almost scoffing her boots.

"What!?" She said aloud, eyes wide.

"You heard what I said." Hiccup told her, his voice was dull, unaffected and he tugged her closer, getting them back into step.

"Hiccup, you mean the Ragnarok? The one in all of the books? The end of the world where not even the Gods all survive?"

"Yep." He said, still dryly.

"And Toothless is a part of it? How in Odin's name do you know that?"

"I had this dreamâ€|" Hiccup started and Astrid prepared herself for the weirdness. There were a lot of things she had to just accept while being with Hiccup. His being able to talk to dragons, this divine dragon heart journey, and even the weird future dreams.

"Like the glowing girl dream?" She asked.

"Kind ofâ€|it was in the same place as that dream, only I was sitting in this tree and talking to a hawk who said the dragon heart was supposed to stop Ragnarok or something like thatâ€|and then Nidhogg showed up but he came out of Toothless."

"Came out ofâ€|?" Astrid trailed.

"As in Toothless split in two and Nidhogg came out of him." Hiccup spun her around, but Astrid winced at the image.

"So what, Toothless is some kind of gateway?" Astrid asked.

"A portal, for Nidhogg to come here, I guess." Hiccup pulled her a little closer, though it seemed on impulse. Their stomachs touched and his hands tightened, but his mind still seemed elsewhere.

"It's just," Hiccup continued, "Toothless thinks our friendship is over now that I know what he was made for and I can't seem to get him to realize that our friendship is bigger than that. I justâ€|" he sighed "â€|I don't know what to do, Alastair."

The look Hiccup gave her then was one of absolute loss and begging. Astrid wished she could've told him something so miraculously helpful that it would fix everything but she was drawing a blank. It was a tough call from any angle when it came to those two. Hiccup and Toothless were on opposite ends of the struggle, each destined to provide aid to opposing sides.

But all Hiccup wanted Toothless to know was that their friendship would make itâ€|that he'd push through the odds like Hiccup always did.

Astrid smiled at the thought,

"Hiccup," Astrid started. "Do you remember back to when I was in the cell at Berk?" Hiccup looked at her, his face contorted, as if the memory hurt him as much as it did her.

"Alastair, why are you bringing that up?" He sighed.

"Because you still came for me, even when you could've easily flown off with Toothless as soon as you left the Kill Ring. You came back to free me and take me with you."

"Of course I did," Hiccup told her effortlessly. "I'd never leave you

behind."

"I know," Astrid smiled. "And its things like that that make you an amazing person, Hiccup."

Hiccup shared her grin, looking at his feet. His face reddened as his chin sank into his neck sash. "So what are you saying?" he asked.

"I'm saying that maybe you just need to do a little something for Toothless, remind him that your friendship is bigger than the situation like you say it is."

Hiccup's tongue poking holes in his cheek as he thought.

It was only a few moments before his eyes lit back up the fire catching the spark and reflected it breathtakingly. His neck rearing up and determination sparking more than the bonfire.

"Got something?"

"Yep." He grinned, giving her another spin, one that he put his all into before he pulled her closer. Really close. "But I'm gonna need your help to finish it." He smiled at her.

"What else is new?" Astrid said, but once he gave her that smile she would've said yes to anything.

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..:I hope this was worth waking me up so late at night for.::
Toothless grumbled when Hiccup woke up many hours past midnight. The rest of the crew was sleeping soundly in their quarters, leaving only Hiccup and Alastair working in the makeshift smithy into the wee hours of the night.

..:Hopefully it is.:: Hiccup inhaled sharply, taking the dragon as quietly as possible to the smithy. He and Alastair had been working each night for the past three nights on Toothless's tail. It still took so much longer within Johann's not-quite-a-smithy, but it was finally finished on their last night on port in Humber.

Once there, Hiccup felt Toothless's spine straighten at the sight of his new tail perched up and Alastair wearing a wide grin as she held it.

..:You've finished the tail? :: Toothless asked, as if surprised.

..:Of course I did.:: Hiccup smiled, glad that Toothless seemed a more docile compared to his previous attitude. His defensive walls stayed up, but his mood was definitely lifted. ::But that's not all,:: Hiccup continued, ::I put something special on it.::

Alastair lifted the tail a little more as Hiccup walked over to the tail, pointing at the design that he and Alastair spent the last day carefully embroidering into the tough cloth. Toothless tilted his head as he looked at it though, not getting significance of the intricate design other than it looking nice.

_:::It's a special knot among those in the North,::: _Hiccup explained and Toothless eyed the design carefully. He raised an arm, looking as if he wanted to touch it, but put it down just as quickly and continued to just stare. _:::It symbolizes love and friendship. Usually it's worn on a necklace but I figured this worked just as well.::: _Hiccup breathed, looking as the dragon still stared at the design. Toothless's thoughts were all over the place it almost gave Hiccup a headache as he tried to sort out and pick at least one out of the pile. What he got was gratitude, yet still uncertainty.

Hiccup let out a breath and Alastair stood behind him.

"Does he like it?" Alastair asked in a whisper, but Hiccup didn't provide a straight answer. He just looked at Toothless staring quietly at the tail.

"I'll just leave you two alone for a little while." Alastair said slowly.

"Um, okay, thanks for all of your help Alastair." Hiccup said but she was already creeping out the door.

And they were alone. Toothless still wasn't saying anything and Hiccup had just about enough of it.

_:::Toothlessâ€|::: _Hiccup sighed, reaching out to touch him.. _:::You know that no matter what we'll always be friends, right?::: _51st time he had said that, Hiccup thought back-ended.

_:::You've said this many times, I'm aware.::: _Toothless said.

_:::Then why do you still seem so sad and distant?::: _Hiccup groaned. _:::What else am I supposed to do to prove it to you?:::_

There was a pause. Hiccup felt a thought bubbling up in Toothless's mind, but it was held back from what seemed like months worth of restraint.

Stillâ€|he said it.

_:::Don't go after the Dragon Heart.::: _Toothless let it out, immediately looking away in shame.

Hiccup's eyes widened. _That's w_hat he wanted? For Hiccup to just stop looking for the dragon heart altogether? Then what were they running towards? Hiccup knew very well what he was running away _from _but shifting to a goalless journey of aimless wandering seemed so shameful, almost embarrassing, even for an ex-prince.

The sadness welled up within the dragon was enough to make Hiccup consider it. But he couldn't be able to agree without regret. Regret of never knowing what his powers were for, and regret of leaving Berk and the throne for nothing. For dishonoring, for _killing, _all for nothing.

:::Iâ€|::: Hiccup started, trying to collect his thoughts, but Toothless's begs and pleads fogged up his mind. Hiccup tried to not

lose sight of the important things.

His dreams, the monsters he saw, the ice storm and Nidhogg. The Hawk's prophecy of Ragnarok. How the Dragon Heart was supposed to stop it.

What if Ragnarok really was coming, and Hiccup didn't do his part to stop it? Then he'd be playing for the wrong side. For Toothless's side, apparently.

:::This is what I mean.: _Toothless turned his head away, clearly reading Hiccup's mind. _:::What we have is only going to further complicate things. Our destinies are torn._:

:::I don't believe that.: _Hiccup said desperately. _:::I don't believe this was meant to tear us apart. Maybeâ€|maybe this is just telling us that we're meant to stop this in another wayâ€|orâ€|:_: _Hiccup tried to finish the sentence, or at least the thought. But he was rambling incoherently as it was, and he didn't know _where _he was going with it anymore.

There was silence for a good five minutes. Boy and dragon each in their own thoughts, trying to think of something positive or at least advancing to say but each kept drawing a blank.

Hiccup had to find the dragon heart, and Toothless didn't want to find the person that was supposed to kill him. That much was certain.

:::What if you justâ€|don't help Nidhogg?: Hiccup said. All those minutes of thinking and that was the best he could come up with. Even Toothless gave him a dry look.

:::It doesn't work like that.:

:::How?:

:::Because it's not my choice. My existence alone means that he could come any time.: _Toothless sat, burying his head in his arms. He looked at the tail, red cloth flickering in the candle light, tightly stitched, white embroidery bunching in the center. The tail was the freedom Hiccup had given him, the symbol on it his plead to keep their friendship. Toothless knew this, Hiccup could tell. But the facts of their futures still hung between them, and nothing could get rid of it.

:::I'm going to find the dragon heart, Toothless.: _Hiccup said, sternly with a saddened face. _:::But,_:_ he emphasized_. _:::I'm going to convince them that there's another way to end Ragnarok without you getting killed._:

Toothless snorted, he didn't believe it.

:::Alright, you don't have to like it or believe me right now. But I'm going to do it.: _Hiccup said, his mind made up.

"Maybe that's what my powers are forâ€|?" Hiccup mumbled to himself. "Maybe I'm some kind of link between humans and dragonsâ€|?"

_:::They'll be coming for me soon.::: _Toothless said, though it felt more like a distant thought.

:::What do you mean? Who's they?:::

:::I told you a while ago that I was supposed to be meeting with father to learn more about my role during his coming, but since I'm not back at the nest anymoreâ|:::

_:::â€|They'll be coming to get you?::: _Hiccup gulped.

:::To take me to father. Our meetings are inevitable.:::

The timetable wasn't very specific, but Hiccup knew that whatever dragon heart they had to find would have to be before they came for Toothless.

:::Alright then, we've got some serious searching to do.:::

:::You really think the dragon heart is in this region?:::

:::Who knowsâ€|the world's pretty big, but here is a good start.:::

Another pause between them as their thought simmered. It wasn't the ideal conclusion but the conversation seemed to end on a good note.

Hiccup let out a deep breath, leaning against Toothless for warmth as the nights just kept getting colder and he looked down at the tail.

_:::Hey.::: _Hiccup said.

:::Hmm?:::

_:::How about we try this out?::: _Hiccup suggested, a wide grin as he lifted the new tail up.

:::This region has flight restrictions, doesn't it?:::

_:::It's night so no one will see us.::: _Hiccup shrugged it off. Toothless tried to seem calm and mature, but even Hiccup could tell he was absolutely bursting with a need to fly. Though Hiccup couldn't help but notice the very specific hook to the dragon's thoughts.

Toothless wanted to fly, yes. But the night fury wanted more so to fly with _him _than the act of just flying itself.

They stayed out until the sun began to crest the clouds. Johann's ship would be barred as the crew moved out on their horseback ride to in the inland trade of Lincoln. But for the night, Hiccup and Toothless danced in a rhythm all their own. One that involved the wind and clouds and timing that had seemed effortless despite it being a month since they had ascended.

Effortless was always what Hiccup thought of when it came to Toothless. There was something beyond even thoughts, as if they both just moved the same before motions translated to thoughts when it

came to flying. The new tail evened out perfectly even in the harsh winter chill, held together by months on bonding and sealed in a northern knot embroidered tightly.

There was no way their friendship was doomed, Hiccup just couldn't believe it. Fate was giving them a chance as Ragnarok crested the horizon with the sun. The wind whipped through Hiccup's hair, fluttering his eye lids and ruffling in the new tunic Alastair had got for him. His heck sash ruffled and his hands bunched on the reigns in the biting cold of the dawning morning.

In his ears he heard whispers that seemed to slip into his mind like it was a dream.

_:::Don't get too caught up.::: _Toothless tried to tell him, but Hiccup could feel both of their hearts swelling in unison.

This was it, Hiccup knew. Ragnarok wasn't written in stone, and he'd go to Helheim and back making sure that they'd change everything.

OoO

"You know, you could at least look like you want people to buy this stuff." Alastair said, but Hiccup kept his nose buried in the dragon heart book.

He had been trying to decipher as much as he could without translation for days as Johann put them on duty manning one of his many trading stands in Lincoln. He had let them slack off while they were making the tail in Humber, but now that Toothless was mobile again, it was "time to pull their own weight in the trade" as Johann put it.

Though it mostly consisted of Alastair making all the sales and Hiccup reading while Toothless and Nimfer grumbled in their leashes.

"I think I kind of have a clue what this page is about." Hiccup turned to Toothless pointed to one of the first pages. "It seems like a big ice storm is coming, that's the first sign of Ragnarok."

_:::Seems accurate.::: _Toothless gave a nod.

"Well I'll believe that" Alastair shivered as another chill went over them. Lincoln was more inland, sure, but the cold didn't seem to let up even as they were away from the water. "What else have you figured out?" She asked.

"And well, that's all I got so far." Hiccup grinned as Alastair gave him a lidded glare. "I said 'this page' not the entire book, Alastair, geez."

"Um excuse me." A girl's voice broke their conversation. She was small, dark-skinned, and certainly not a native to Anglo-Saxon, but she mostly looked with interest at Hiccup. He blushed a little, holding the book to his chest.

"Yes, may I help you?" Alastair planted herself firmly between them.

"Would you like to buy something, or make an equal trade?"

"I'm not interested in any of the stuff on display." The girl said rather bluntly, still looking at Hiccup. "But I am interested in that book you're holding, sir."

Hiccup's blush quickly faded and he looked down at the book before he pulled it closer.

"Sorry but this isn't for sale." He said, just as bluntly. "Or looking." He added.

"Oh, come on, just a peak?" The girl reached forward but Alastair slapped the backside of her hand.

"I believe he said no looking." Alastair glared, but her glare was followed by a lower growl from Toothless and the girl took two steps back.

"You have a very rare book there, sir. I just hope you know the value of what you're holding." She said as she pulled her cloak's hood over her head and walked away, turning every few steps to give them a cut-eyed glance.

"Well that was weird." Hiccup said, keeping an eye on the girl until she completely disappeared into the crowd. "She knew about this book, and she definitely isn't a native."

"You think she might be the one?" Alastair asked.

"Not sure, she looks nothing like the girl I saw in my dream, but it was just a dream, after all. Appearances might be different in real life."

"Maybe you should follow her while I man the cart, find out where she lives?"

"That might seem too suspicious."

"Well, she might not be dangerous, I mean, the dragon heart is supposed to be helpful, right?"

Hiccup chewed on the thought, though before another customary came by, and older man, dressed in thick and expensive looking garments that bunched at his belly.

"Hello sir." Alastair greeted. "Would you like to buy something or make an equal trade?"

"I'm sorry but I couldn't help but notice that you have a very interesting dragon there." The man said, ignoring Alastair's opening sentence.

Hiccup and Alastair both looked over at Toothless and the dragon tensed up.

"Yeah, what's it to you?" Hiccup leaned forward, challenging the man.

"Well, rare dragons are certainly worth quite a coin around here."

Fair trade is fair trade, after all." He laughed a good hearty laugh, but Hiccup felt a twist in his stomach. "Could be useful in the fields, or maybe the meat's good?"

"Are you suggesting that I sell Toothless so you can eat him?" Hiccup asked, almost laughing at the outlandishness of the man's offer.

"Toothless!?" the man's laugh continued. "Oh, that's just comical!"

Hiccup was just about fed up with manning the cart for the day. First some mysterious girl wanted the book and now this man was suggesting he sell Toothless.

"Look here youâ€"" Hiccup stood, rolling up his sleeve, but Alastair rose with him, placing an arm in front of him to halt his motions.

"Sir, with all due respect, if you're not going to buy what's on display you should kindly leave. Our dragon is not for sale no matter how rare he is." Alastair said, much more calmly than Hiccup would've. Though he still stared the man down even as Alastair spoke, just for good measure.

The man's face went from kindly to cunning within a matter of seconds, though. A drop that Hiccup was already common with as he recalled his cousin.

"The girl that was here before me was inquiring about that book, correct?"

"Maybe." Alastair said.

"Maybe not." Hiccup added. "Again, what's it to you?"

The man took out a small cut of parchment, it smelled heavily of ink from a local printer, stained with the tons of coins he must've paid to have so many of them on stock.

The parchment had his name on it, and a small map to what seemed like his house.

"Courtland Lizbeth." Hiccup read the name slowly.

"At your service, young sir..." He left the sentence open.

"Albar." Hiccup finished for him, crossing his arms.

"Well then Albar, I think you and I would do well having a chat at my quarters tomorrow evening."

"Why should I?" Hiccup asked.

"The matter of you dragon is a little more pressing than you think. And after all," the man looked down, the dragon heart book on the floor. "I might know a thing or two about that book you're trying to read."

Hiccup's eyes widened.

"Youâ€|?" Hiccup stuttered.

"You're bluffing." Alastair stepped in.

"Maybe, maybe not." Courtland teased. "I suppose you two will have to show up at my place to find out. Afternoon gentleman." Courtland excused himself, garments floating on rich air as he left.

Hiccup sat down, holding the book closely to him.

"What do you think?" Alastair asked and Hiccup looked at the small parchment that Courtland had left. He didn't give an answer, and Alastair turned back to the cart rather than waiting for one.

_::That man kept looking at me, why?:: _Toothless asked.

_::It's a long one, Toothless.:: _Hiccup said as he settled, his eyes darting between the book, Toothless, and the parchment as he explained.

And so we're in England now! Wellâ€|England before it was England orâ€|something. Anglo Saxon!

**And as for the knot design that was on Toothless's new tail, it's called a Northern Knot. You can just google the Viking version of it to see what it looks like. **

Review Responses:

Guest Girl: You're welcome, I'm glad the chapter was fun!

**BlackWingedAngel26: Really? Well, thank you very much! And I'm glad you like Nimfir, he's a cute addition to the group.
**

TheDelta724: Yeah, I was just so busy with school I couldn't update regularly, but summer is here so the updates are back!

Kitty.0: Whoa, you reviewed, like, every chapter in no time at all. More power to you for reading so much!

Warrior of Spectra: Thank you! I'm the story is getting better, causeâ€|that's the goal XD

**Wolffury: Yeah, it's easy to forget that some of the main characters in the franchise have yet to show up. But each will show up eventually, I just felt like if they didn't have to be on Berk than I could use them for other, more interesting things within the story. And this story is a mix of the entire book and movie franchise as a whole, which includes the sequels so, you can expect plot details to be slipped in there, some might be big others little, it just depends. **

**Summer: Ah, I love when people are well versed in cartoon culture! I didn't think anyone would notice my homage to Teen Titans in this story, but alas, someone did. I applaud you. **

92firedemon: Thank you!

**Necro-wulf: The whole theory of Ragnarok and it's timeline/events have been modified slightly for the storyâ€"or else anyone could just go google ragnarok and figure out exactly how the story is gonna pan out and that's no fun, so answering any questions on what this story's Ragnarok will have is definitely spoiler territory.
**

Ferdoos: Thank you!

**A-Q the Authoress: More bad news just keeps coming the further the story goes along. **

AliceCullen3: Thank you!

**Noctus Fury: I wish I could answer these questions, but I cannot. And you're the one who sent me tons of plotline suggestions, right? I really appreciate how into the story you've gotten, but the story is pre-planned pretty far in to the plot, so I really don't take recommendations unless something really just isn't working.
**

**SAmaster01: The Anglo-Saxons are more English, though within the story Rome is kind of influencing everyoneâ€"which as to why will be revealed laterâ€"so they're definitely tight allies with the Romans, and they all treat their dragons the same. And yeah, it was a tough choice to have Gobber and Hiccup *practically* strangers in this story, but Gobber fit this role so much better than simply putting him on Berk for the sake of him just being on Berk. And, haha, umâ€|.no. This isn't a cross over story at all, so no one outside the httyd franchise will show up. Sorry. **

Rose: Hello fellow rose! And I've just been busy with school, so thus the no updates. But clearly it's summer now so I'm glad to be back with this story!

Thanks for all of the reviews everyone, glad to know you guys are still pumped about this story!

Next chapter: Booked and Bogged

19. Booked and Bogged

**Officially moving into a new story arc here, so buckle up!
**

**Also this is a day late, sorry about that but as you all know "How to Train Your Dragon 2" came out this weekend and whew boy, that was quite a ride. My head's still reeling from that movie (it does things to you). But yeah, that movie basically took over my brain and rendered me a useless blob of nothing for two days in terms of writing this particular story. **

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter 19: Booked and Bogged

The nighttime streets of Lincoln were filled with drunks, children,

and the grunts of restricted dragons being tortured for fun in the town center.

Hiccup pulled his neck sash up to his nose and tugged Toothless along on his leash while he tried to block out the horrified screams of a dragon dying within him. It was a hard thing to swallow that Hiccup had actually gotten used to those kinds of noises. After witnessing the destruction of Berk Hiccup figured he could handle anything, but it still turned his stomach despite him expecting it.

Toothless nudged at his backside.

Everything will be in it's correct place eventually. _Toothless told him, though Hiccup didn't know what he even meant by that. Hiccup's job was to find the Dragon Heart, to bridge the gap, he supposed, but he was no peacemaker between species, especially not in the south where he was nothing more than the common boy Albar tugging along his mis-registered, rare-type dragon with his brother Alastair to the manor of Courtland Lizbeth. Not that Hiccup didn't long to become a peacekeeper, but his lack of power and influence over anything made him feel smaller than life, he hated it, and suddenly had a renewed urge to find the dragons heart, and serve his usefulness.

Hiccup held the Dragon Heart book closer, looking back at Toothless.

What are you about to tell me that dragons and humans are supposed to get along at the end of Ragnarok? _He joked, though his mind clouded over with pessimism just thinking about it.

I don't know the outcome of Ragnarok yet, but I doubt it'll end well for anyone. _Toothless explained. The outcome was for me and father's next meeting. Though either way I will not make it to see the end. _

Hey, come on, we talked about this. No one killing anyone, remember? So don't talk like that. _

Toothless let out a snuff and Hiccup stopped in his tracks, turning, putting down the barrel of the leash and tugged at the corners of Toothless's mouth, turning them up.

Don't be a grumpy dragon, smile. _Hiccup said, a mocking fashion in his every word. Toothless blew a smoke ring in Hiccup's face, the smell of an almost-fire still slightly crisping the split ends of his hair. He let out a laugh nonetheless.

"Hey, come on you two." They heard Alastair call after them. "We've gotta see what this Courtland guy wants before Johann wonders where we are."

"Coming!"

"Are are you sure it was a good idea to bring Toothless? I mean, he did seem kind of interested in taking him."

"Toothless is a night fury, Alastair, if this guy gets funny with us Toothless canâ€" "

_:::I'm not killing him, no matter how annoying he gets.::: _Toothless said before looking down, his thoughts trailing. _:::Unless, of course he tries to kill you first.::: _

:::No, no. No killing you might just have to make him get the picture, if you catch my drift?:::

:::I'm catching the stupidity of this meeting. Clearly it's not going to be of any good to us.:::

Hiccup rolled his eyes _:::Unless you can see the future, then I think hearing what he has to say is worth a shot. He might know something about the book since he did know about what it was in the first place.:::_

Hiccup bumped right into Alastair's back as she stopped short at the gates to a manor at the end of the markets. She took out the card Courtland had given them the day before.

"Yep, this is it." She sighed. There was a guardsman in a small watchtower by the gate and he looked down on them with a raised eyebrow.

"Hello!" Alastair waved. "Um, we're Albar and Alastair umâ€|" Hiccup saw the lump swallow in Alastair's throat. They had made up their covers, how they were two brothers that were traveling merchants on a ship after the death of their parents, but never a surname.

Hiccup dug a little into some names he had heard back in Humber.

"Ackerman." He blurted out. "Albar and Alastair Ackerman. We're here to see Courtland Lizbeth." Hiccup took the card from Alastair and raised it up towards the guard. "We have somewhat of an appointment."

The guard made no noticeable change in facial expression, but he still began turned the wheel, and the gates slowly rolled open.

The manor itself certainly wasn't as glamorous as it should've seemed to them, but Hiccup was impressed with very little in the cases of fine furnishing since he grew up a Prince. He couldn't help but swallow back laughs at ever glimmer he saw in Alastair's eyes every time she passed by something remarkable. Like she hadn't spend the month in the palace that she did.

The stone of the interior echoed with the same hum that Hiccup hadn't heard since he left Berk, and he wasn't sure if it left him in fond of traumatic memories.

"Ah, Albar, nice to see you could make it." Courtland put down his mug of honey mead, letting out a powerful "ah" before directing them to his study.

"You do have some interesting points you brought up." Hiccup placed the book in his lap. "So I don't really want to dance around the issue here, what do you know about this book Sir Lizbeth?"

"Sir Lizbeth?" Courtland smirked. "Well you certainly are a proper lad," He poured some mead into two mugs and handed them to Hiccup and

Alastair "I respect that."

"I'll bet you do." Hiccup squinted.

"We shall discuss those matters, I assure you that, butâ€œ| Courtland cut his gaze to Alastair. "We speak alone.

"Excuse me?" Alastair stood. "You invited me here as well." Hiccup saw her getting more worked up by the minute.

"With all due respect sir, Alastair is my brother anything you can say in front of me you can say in front of him."

"Your respect is noted, Albar, but this is a sensitive topic, the less people here to twist words, the better."

Alastair opened her mouth in reply but Hiccup placed a hand in front of her, standing and taking her shoulders.

"Leave." He said firmly.

"Hiccup." She whispered. "Are you sure you can handle this guy by yourself? He's pretty crafty."

"You're acting like I haven't spent the past 10 years watching my father handle diplomatic matters." He smiled, squeezing her shoulders a little. "I've got this."

She sucked her teeth, but made no further protest. "For the love of Odin," she had to add, though. "Don't do anything stupid."

"You'd be wise to perhaps explore the garden, it's quaint under the moonlight." Courtland suggested, but Alastair only raised a hand as any indication she had heard him before exiting the room. He turned to Hiccup yet again. "Little brother?"

"Older." Hiccup sat back down. "Only by a little bit, though. He's very protective of me."

"Well with a dragon such as this, who wouldn't be?" Courtland smiled. "That is quite a magnificent species you've got there, a rare-type grapple grounder. I've never seen one so equally proportionate."

"Yeah, well, Toothless is one of a kind."

"And you don't use it for any domestic matters?"

"No, Toothless is more of aâ€œ|umâ€œ|family member."

Courtland let out another laugh, that hearty, big laugh that made Hiccup sink further into his seat. It had an uneasy end to it, like he didn't know if Courtland would be calm or hostile after giving off such a gust of air.

"A rare type dragon that's a family member. Your comical words just keep coming, Albar."

"So about this book," Hiccup tried to change the subject. "You say you know something about it?"

"Oh indeed." Courtland stood, going over to the bookshelf behind him. It was filled with scrolls and manuscripts, rare for anyone even in a trade-heavy city such as Lincoln. Anglo Saxon wasn't known for its riches, but Courtland seemed to have text that heavily leaned towards Roman literature. Maybe he had ties to them, Hiccup wondered? It wasn't odd since much of the Romans expanding rule trickled over to the Saxons at that point.

Courtland pulled out a book, it looked similar to the Dragon Heart Book, only much older, it was carefully kept, but extremely fragile. He recognized the characters on the cover, they looked similar to the characters inside the Dragon Heart book.

Hiccup immediately straighten up in his seat.

_:::He's got another book.::: _Hiccup told Toothless.

:::I can see that. Why?:::

:::I don't know I was hoping you knew.:::

_:::I didn't even know about the book you have.::: _

"I'm a collector of sorts, Albar." Courtland explained. "The topic of the Dragon Heart is an age old lore, unfortunately lost to time. These are the only two books in existence that tell anything of real merit about it."

"Can you at least tell me what language it's written in?"

"Pre-human."

"Preâ€|.wait what?"

Courtland walked up to Hiccup, his unsettling stature casting a shadow over him.

"What do you know about Ragnarok, boy?" Courtland asked, a serious hiss under his tongue.

Hiccup impulse was to curl under the shadow, but he stood his ground. "What do you?" He asked instead.

Courtland smirked and opened his book. "This is the book of Ranka, it's older than the first known human of our time." He pointed to Hiccup's book. "That is the Legend of the Dragon Heart, dates back very early to humanity's beginning if you believe or not. One of the first illuminated manuscripts discovered. But it's a folk lore in much of its entirety."

"What!? This book isn't true?"

"Oh no, no, don't get me wrong, some if not half of that book has truth to it, but it's nothing compared to the crowned jewel." Courtland held up the Book of Ranka.

"You want this book don't you, Sir Lizbeth?" Hiccup held the dragon heart book closer to him and Toothless bared his teeth.

"You catch on rather quickly, Albar."

"But why? If half of it isn't true?"

"To fill in the blanks. Ranka's book is rather old, some pages are lost to the sands and erosion of time. And it's all in good interest, of course, the end of the world is no laughing matter, young man."

"I'm not the one laughing." Hiccup squinted. "I want to protect the world from Ragnarok just as much as the next person."

"That's good." Courtland stomped. "I'm glad to hear that, Albar." Placed the Book of Ranka down on his desk, taking a tool and flipping the pages carefully. "If you would come here please, Albar."

Hiccup raised a brow but walked over, looking carefully at the open page in Ranka's book and almost gasped.

He saw a night fury, devouring people before pictures of it turning into a portal went to the next page.

"A rare type grapple grounder, eh?" Courtland also raised a brow.

"I-Iâ€| "

"Albar you are aware that you are currently housing an illegal dragon? Night Furies are considered the first if not the most important component of Ragnarokâ€|and here you are wheeling it through Lincoln and calling it a family member."

Hiccup took a few steps back, his heart pounding.

_:::What's wrong?" _He heard Toothless ask. _:::What did he show you?:::_

"What authority are you?" Hiccup tried to sound as cunning as Courtland, but the tremble in his voice eradicated any intimidation he had. Hiccup almost longed for his diplomatic immunity or at least being able to order people to stand down or they'd have to deal with his father, but those days were over, and now he was just a skinny kid trying to haggle information out of a grown man.

"I work for Sanctuary." Courtland said, very business-like yet again.

"I don't know what that is."

"I'm not surprised, but we're both working towards the same goal here, all we want is to make sure humanity is preserved after Ragnarok, we can't have another disaster like last time."

"Last timeâ€|?" Hiccup began to question, but Courtland pulled him up by his neck sash, with little strength of Courtland's part Hiccup was dangling over the floor and Toothless bit his claws into the ground, roaring.

:::It's alright Toothless, not now.::: Hiccup said.

"Listen here, boy. I have every right in my power to arrest you and take your dragon to the emperor or you could cooperate and we can save mankind."

"The emperor...?" Hiccup thought twice. Anglo Saxon didn't have an emperor—but Rome did.

"Dagur?"

Toothless let out a growl and Hiccup turned his head best he could to see a trio of men coming into the room and taking the dragon heart book out of the Hiccup's seat. Toothless kept throwing the men, but more kept coming in the room.

"No!" Hiccup wiggled in Courtland's grasp, but he wasn't armed, and his own strength wasn't enough.

"Detain that beast!" Courtland ordered and Hiccup saw the next man come in with a sword, swiftly jabbing Toothless in the side as the night fury was preoccupied with keeping the other men away from the book.

"Toothless!" Hiccup reached out, but Courtland threw him against the bookshelf, knocking the wind out of him. Scrolls and manuscripts fell atop Hiccup's head as he saw the men across the room binding down Toothless's leash further, the chains and barrel covered in the blood coming from his fresh stab. "T-tooth!"

Courtland stood over him again, the shadow of him seeming darker, more menacing.

"Are you the dragon heart?" Courtland asked.

"I'm looking for her!" Hiccup coughed, though his back was beginning to fog his mind. He still had a faded wound from when the dragons took him back on Berk, and the biting pain began to shoot up his spine and zap his brain. "Just let Toothless go!" Hiccup begged, but Toothless had already been dragged out to Thor knew where.

Courtland placed a meaty hand around Hiccup's neck, squeezing hard.

"Why should I?" Courtland smirked.

"Alas-tair." Hiccup tried to call out, but he knew any muffled rasp of a call he let out wouldn't reach the garden.

Still, a sudden crash through the window sent glass flying into the study, Hiccup barely felt the shards slicing thinly through his cheek as he saw the shadow of the cloaked girl drop in. She had twin blades in her hands and took no time to slash the ankles of all the men left in the room. She ran right up to Courtland, jabbing one of her blades into right to his throat, teasing a kill.

"Let him go." She ordered, her movements so quick Hiccup didn't even know if he had blinked yet.

"Who the hell are you?" Courtland hissed and with that she knocked

him down, stepping powerfully on his stomach, the squishy collapse of his insides swishing and wind pushed out of him before he passed out.

She took down the cloth she had over her mouth and reached out a hand to Hiccup.

"You!" Hiccup tried to keep his eyes open. It was the girl from the market. She didn't wait for a response and picked Hiccup up herself, slinging him over her shoulder and going back out the broken window.

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"Hold still."

"Why should I? I don't even know you." Astrid struggled as she continued to avoid jabs from a mysterious. She seemed to drop from nowhere and then suddenly wanted to detain her. Astrid wasn't armed but she tried her best to avoid any kind of fightingâ€"since the girl had a knife on herâ€"and slowly make her way towards the manor.

Either way, Astrid immediately regretted leaving Hiccup alone with Courtland.

"What do you even want with me?" Astrid asked, her words a little broken as she moved.

"Asha said that she saw you with the boy at the market yesterday."

"I don't know who Asha is either."

"Camicazi!" Another voice called out and Astrid turned to see the same dark-skinned girl from the markets carrying Hiccup over her shoulder. "I've got him let's go."

"Did you get the books?" the girl Astrid had been fightingâ€"apparently Camicaziâ€"asked.

"I didn't have time, it was pretty messy in there."

"Dammit." Camicazi stomped.

"Hey, let go of him." Astrid called out, tugging at Hiccup but Asha gave no resistance to let him go. She laid him down on the ground, but he was out cold. "Oh Gods, Hiccup are you okay?"

"We don't have time for this, they'll be coming after us." Camicazi said and grabbed Hiccup right out of Astrid's hands. "Asha, you get the blond one."

"Yep." Asha grabbed Astrid and they both bolted out of the manor, hopping the outside of the gates in such an ease Astrid wondered if they secretly had wings.

Though a pair of wings entered her vision soon enough as both girls mounted a lanky rainbow-colored dragon that was waiting right outside for them.

"Stormfly, let's go." Camicazi called out and they all hopped on. Astrid too shocked and disjointed by the quick movements to fight back. But as soon as they were in the air, the rise in her stomach reminded her of the first time Hiccup took her flying.

She had been out of the sky for too long, and being hoisted over a girl's shoulder wasn't helping either. She wiggled.

"Okay you two have about five seconds to explain what's going on orâ€"

"You're in no danger." Asha said.

"At least not from us. Lizbeth down there might have a bone to pick with you, though."

"Why, what happened?" Astrid asked as Asha finally let her down. She took a seat on the dragon's back, it's body rippling as it flew, though Camicazi and Asha seemed to ride the waves of flight perfectly. Astrid simply wasn't used to it, she liked the smoother gliding of Toothless, better.

"Your friend should be able to tell you when he wakes up."

"He's my brother. And I'd prefer you'd just tell me right now?" Astrid raised her voice.

"You're not really in a position to demand anything from us, you're on my dragon, and I can throw you off whenever I want." Camicazi smirked.

"Don't be like that, Cami." Asha sighed and turned to Astrid. "We're just trying to get back what was stolen from us."

"The books?" Astrid remember what Camicazi had asked before they left. She looked at Hiccup, still passed out, no Toothless, no book, and Lizbeth was after him. What had happened? "So Lizbeth wants the books, you two want the books, how do I know which one of you is good?"

"Good is such a relative term, don't you think?" Camicazi said dryly. Astrid sighed, about to hit someone before Hiccup began to stir. His head popped up from Asha's shoulder and looked straight at Astrid, eyes dark and wide, and his face with two sliced cuts on them. Astrid reached forward and cupped his cheek, examining the cuts but smiled nonetheless.

"Hey." She said softly.

"Alastairâ€|wha...was that you who saved me?"

"That would be me." Asha hoisted him a little higher on her shoulder. "But I wasn't able to retrieve the books, or your dragon."

"We'll be back for those later, don't you worry." Camicazi said.

"I'm confused." Hiccup groaned, slumping on Asha's shoulder regardless.

"Join the club." Astrid shared his groan.

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They landed at small camp far outside Lincoln. Their campsite was dimly lit by the embers of a dying fire, a smoke trail their only giveaway. Stormfly landed around a circle of sleeping girls, while two men seemed to be working on something in the thicket near the forest.

Once they heard the thump of the dragon's landing they both looked up and one of them walked towards them.

"What's going on, Alastair, are we captured or what?" Hiccup asked as they all dismounted.

"I'm not sure, but if they wanted to hurt us they probably would've done it already."

"Hey, where have you guys been, it's been way over an hour, I was starting to get worried." One of the men asked, he fussed over Camicazi checking her arms and face frantically until she slapped him away.

"Oh calm down, Fishlegs, everything's fine."

"Well, sort of, we've got the boy, but the books and his dragon are still back at Lizbeth's."

"Dragon dung," Fishlegs muttered a swear under his breath before looking up at Hiccup and Astrid, they both tensed up. He was a big guy, that was for certain, but his soft voice deterred them from feeling too scared. Fishlegs walked right up to them, eyeing them both with almost childish curiosity.

"So which one of you is it?"

"Beg pardon?" Hiccup asked.

"The dragon heart?"

Hiccup and Astrid both looked at each other. "Um, neither." Astrid replied.

"Huhâ€|Asha I thought you said you found a boy who was the dragon heart?" Fishlegs whined.

"I said one of them might be the dragon heart." Asha shoved him aside. "Don't put words in my mouth." She pulled the cloth down from her mouth and took down her hood, short black hair falling to her neck as she gave them both a good look, minding no personal space either of them might had.

"So how'd you find that book?" She asked.

"Okay that's it." Astrid pushed her back a little bit and stood in front of Hiccup. "Either you all start talking about what the heck is going on here or Odin help me, I'llâ€!"

"Okay, okay, no need to bring Odin into this." Fishlegs stepped forward. "Apologizes if Cami and Asha didn't explain anything." He leaned forward and whispered. "They're good at stealth missions but not so much with people skills."

"I heard that!" Camicazi yelled.

"We're a band of travelers, if you will. We're all on a ship called the Bog Boss. We've been trying to find artifacts and clues to Ragnarok for a long time now and those books were taken from us by Courtland Lizbeth and the Sanctuary alliance."

"So you're pirates?" Hiccup simplified.

"'Pirates' is such a grimy word. I prefer the term traveling collectors."

"The Legend of the Dragon Heart was stolen a long time ago, but we were able to keep the Book of Ranka until quite recently. We thought the dragon heart book was lost forever since apparently even Sanctuary lost it." Asha said, getting back in their faces again. "So again, where'd you find it?"

Hiccup opened his mouth but Astrid placed hand over his mouth.

"Don't answer that." Astrid warned.

"I wasn't going to answer them." Hiccup shoved her hand away. He turned to Fishlegs and Asha. "Do you mind if me and my brother talk privately for a minute?"

Camicazi inserted herself in the huddle. "Why, you got something to hide?"

"No more than you do." Hiccup bit back and Camicazi gave him a respectful nod as if to say "well played".

"Ten minutes," Asha allowed and Astrid pulled Hiccup aside.

"Talk." Astrid demanded.

"You talk, you were the one that was conscious. Who are these people?"

"I don't know." Astrid sighed. "But what happened in there with Lizbeth? Why is he suddenly after you, and where's Toothless?"

"Lizbeth is part of some Sanctuary thing," Hiccup began to ramble, "and he knows all about Ragnarok and what part Toothless plays in it and he probably knows more than we do."

"Well then," Astrid bit her lip, just as unsettled as Hiccup probably was at someone knowing about everything they had spent the past 3 months trying to figure out. "Who do we trust? These guys or Lizbeth? They both seem to know their stuff."

"Well we can't trust Lizbeth he stole Toothless." Hiccup looked down at his feet, his fists balling as he spoke. "They hurt him and

took him away, all because they think he's dangerous!"

Astrid took one of his hands and cupped it with hers, doing her best to calm him down. "We'll get him back, Hiccup."

Hiccup looked back over to the fire, sighing. "And these guys I guess since Lizbeth stole from them that they're okay, and we all seem to be going after the same thing for now and!" Astrid followed Hiccup's gaze, going to Camicazi, she went to a basket and took out some fish, letting Stormfly eat some.

"She has a dragon too, I know." Astrid finished and gave Hiccup's hand another squeeze. "We'll go along with them for now, since I'm sure they're planning to go back to Lizbeth's. We'll get the book, we'll get Toothless and we'll get out there."

Hiccup nodded. "Did you tell them anything while I was passed out?"

"No, we should stick to our English cover story for now, they're still pirates after all." She smiled, trying to lighten the mood. "Okay, little brother?"

"Hey, now don't get too cocky with that."

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The stealth mission "part two" as Fishlegs called it was a go. They'd leave right at the two hour mark before dawn when the shadows were the darkest and the moon was getting higher before the sun crested over the horizon.

It was the same people that went before, Hiccup, Alastair, Camicazi, and Asha though another person had been added to the mix and she made Hiccup feel more than a little uncomfortable.

"Um, are you sure that your dragon can hold all these people?" Hiccup asked. He knew that when he was just he and Alastair Toothless got winded easier, but then Toothless had a much smaller body than Stormfly seemed to. Her rainbow skin still twinkled despite the light.

:::Silly human thinks I cannot carry my own::: Hiccup heard Stormfly snuff and he smirked, wanting to blow her mind by speaking back but he kept quiet. He didn't know how deep of a bond Camicazi and Stormfly had, and until he knew a little more about them, it was best he keep his powers to himself.

"Don't worry she's a trooper," Camicazi smirked. "She once carried the whole crew in the storm, five people shouldn't bother her. And if she was angry, she'd let me know, trust me."

Asha rode quietly, her cloak flapping and mouth covered by cloth. And Alastair kept close, clutching the sword Camicazi had given her for defense. Hiccup was offered a sword as well, but asked if they had any daggers. He was given odd squat swords by the new girl that was also tagging along. She called them butterfly swords, and her weird weaponry didn't stop at that, she, herself, had two odd hooked swords in an X at her back, and they jostled as Stormfly's body moved much too loosely for Hiccup's taste. Her back ruffled in laughter before

she turned around to grin at him. It wasn't really a pleasant grin though, it seemed almost sinister.

"Uhâ€|" Hiccup swallowed.

"You got a problem?" Alastair asked.

"You like my swords, ya?" She asked, her raspy voice seemed childishly curious.

"They're nice." Alastair rolled her eyes, though Hiccup was sure she missed her axe back on Berk. He had to remember to get her a new weapon in Lincoln.

The girl ripped the swords from her back and swung them, twirling them over her thumbs and hopped up on her feet, riding each wave of Stormfly's flight and balancing like she was standing on solid ground.

"You should see me spar with them, I'm the greatest you've ever seen!"

"Sit down, Hookfang." Asha grabbed the back of Hookfang's tunic and made her sit. "You'll draw too much attention from the watch towers if you're standing like that.

"Hookfang?" Alastair chuckled a bit.

"Yeah, Hookfang." She shrugged, waving her swords again, though more mildly. "For my hook swords."

"Your parents really named you after hook swords?" Alastair asked, though Hiccup had heard much stranger names back in the Archipelago. But Hookfang hardly looked Norse, she seemed more oriental.

"Who said my parents gave me this name?" Hookfang raised a brow, seeming genuinely confused, though she hugged Asha. "The crew gave me this name, gave my little brother a name too, they're our family."

"O-ohâ€|" Alastair immediately slinked back and Hiccup just watched. He hadn't gotten too good of a look at the crew entirely while they were at the camp, there wasn't a lot of them, maybe eight, and most of them were sleeping. Only one of them was out in the forest working on something and didn't say a word. But they all seemed to be ragtag kids and teenagers all different nationalities. Hiccup smiled, feeling a new giddiness within him for being immersed in the cultures he only read about back on Berk.

"We're coming up on our target guys, look alive." Camicazi called out as Stormfly steadily descended in the back fields behind Lizbeth's manor. Asha, what's the rundown?" Camicazi asked when they all dismounted.

"You and Albar should go in this time, they've already seen me twice, Alastair and I will stay out here and stand guard, keep anyone from coming in." Asha drew the cloth from her mouth momentarily, speaking clearly.

Camicazi scratched her chin, mulling it over.

"Hey, wait, I think it would be better if I stayed with Hi-Albar this time." Alastair said, there was something desperate behind her eyes.

"Too many people," Camicazi shook her head. "Besides, I take it Hookfang is coming with us as well?" Cami asked Asha and she nodded.

"Ho ho, yeah!" Hookfang jumped.

"Hookfang you watch our tails and make sure no one gets in the way, got it?" Camicazi said.

"Don't go too lose canon." Asha glared.

"Aye Aye Mama." Hookfang saluted, her tongue out in excitement.

"You too, Cami." Asha said.

"Aye Aye, Mama." Cami teased. "Alright, let's move." Camicazi, Asha, and Hookfang immediately ran for the gates of the manor, Hiccup gulped at how uniformly they moved.

"Let's go!" Camicazi called out over her shoulder to them. Hiccup began to run behind them, looking down at the 'butterfly swords' and tucked them into his waist belt and pulled his enck sash over his nose.

"Stay safe, Hiccup, you don't know these people that well." Alastair mentioned to him as they caught up.

"I know, I know, you stay safe too," he smiled and lifted his hand, Alastair grabbed it, squeezing for reassurance and they separated.

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The window was their safest best at getting in. Hookfang jostled the latch open with her swords and they swiftly slipped in.

"Keep close," Camicazi whispered.

"Gotcha." Hookfang raised her swords to her nose, walking in wide strides backwards as Cami and Hiccup ran in front.

"Albar, where do you think he'd be keeping your dragon?" Camicazi asked as they ran through the halls, light footed and swiftly. Hiccup tried his best to keep up, but each step he took felt so heavy footed compared to the girls.

"I-I don't know, probably underâ€"" he spoke before a loud crash rumbled the halls. Bright and flickering yellow lights shown against the walls, sparking like fire. "Or, maybe over there?" Hiccup shrugged.

"Geez if your dragon was just going to break out on his own then why'd we come?" Hookfang groaned. "I could've gotten a few more hours of sleep."

"Quiet," Camicazi hissed, readying her sword, her necklaces clanked as she rounded the corner just slightly enough to look around. "No dragon, but he was there. Let's move while the trail is still fresh." Was all she said before she ran out, going faster with each turn she took, avoiding the fire with masterful skill. Hiccup tried his best to keep up, but even Hookfang who was supposed to be watching his back began to get ahead of him.

"H-hey wait!" Hiccup called.

"Gotta keep up." Hookfang teased.

"Yeah come on, you're not gonna let a bunch of girls show you up are you?" Cami stuck out her tongue.

"Iâ€œ" Hiccup was about to say before he was trampled by a heavy and warm body, one he knew too well. Toothless shoved him in the protective encirclement of his wings and tail.

There you are, Toothless said in relief. I was starting to get worried when I saw the sun was starting to rise.

You're alright? Hiccup asked, hugging him. He was up and walking, sure, but he looked at the side of his stomach, the wound there was crusted over in dry blood coated in a wet gloss.

We'll worry about that later, let's get you out of here. Toothless snorted at Camicazi and Hookfang. Who are these females?

No, no, don't, they're friends for now at least. Hiccup assured and Toothless's stance slackened. But Hookfang and Camicazi didn't seem afraid, they seemed more awed.

"Asha never mentioned that your dragon was aâ€œ|aâ€œ|" Camicazi swallowed. "Noâ€œ|wayâ€œ|."

"It's so awesome!" Hookfang jumped, springing right to Toothless and got right in the night fury's face. "Can I touch him?"

"I wouldn't if I were you." Hiccup stopped her. "But he says we should get out of here and quick."

"He says_?" Camicazi slackened her stance, and Hiccup almost slapped his forehead. So much for keeping his powers a secret. "Whoa whoa," Cami continued. "Hold it, you can talk to it?"

"Yes, he's quite the rare find himself, isn't he?" Courtland came from around the corner, a dozen guards behind him.

"Lizbeth." Cami said, mock-formally.

"Miss Imperiosus." Lizbeth said and Hiccup saw Camicazi's face scrunch as if he had stabbed her.

"Don't go bringing my past into this." She warned.

"Very wellâ€œ|but I'll have you know it's rude to intrude on business. Me and Albar here were about to close a very important deal."

"We have no deal. You blew your chance the second you turned on Toothless." Hiccup spoke impulsively, walking forward but Toothless kept his tail in front, shielding him.

"Albar please, don't let their influence shield you from the real goal here. To protect the world from Ragnarok. You know as well as I do that it's coming, not even the Gods stand a chanceâ€¦but that's what Sanctuary is about, we're going to protect humanity from another event like the first Ragnarok, but we need all the information we can get." Lizbeth started to walk over to Hiccup, but he reared back, Toothless growling.

Camicazi seemed like she had enough and jumped forward, springing her legs as she pushed against the wall and jutted towards Lizbeth, locking him with her sword to his neck. Hookfang moved with her, as if they had spoken without words as they moved. Hookfang stayed at Cami's back, her hook swords crossed before her as Lizbeth's guards pointed their dozen swords right to her, waiting for the order from Lizbeth to take them out.

Still, Hiccup's mind was spinning. He didn't really know either parties from the other. Maybe Lizbeth was really just trying to help? But thenâ€"Hiccup looked down at Toothless's woundâ€"he was a violent help.

He wondered what Alastair would do in a situation like this? She'd probably keep on her toes, and trust the one with the greatest advantage. The girls seemed to have virtue on their side, but Lizbeth had the numbers and the resources.

"Wait!" Hiccup called out, everyone locked in a 'say the word and you're dead' grid. But Lizbeth waited for Hiccup's to give any say, oddly calm even as Camicazi held a sword to his throat.

"Tell me about Sanctuary." Hiccup said.

"What are you doing, Albar?" Camicazi spat, digging the sword just grazing Lizbeth's skin.

"Tell me, Lizbethâ€¦what's the real deal with Sanctuary and this 'first Ragnarok', why should I trust you?"

"Hearing both sides of the story, I respect that." Courtland smiled though let out a gag as Camicazi pushed harder.

"Go ahead Lizbeth, tell him, tell him all about your grand vision." Camicazi mocked.

"It's not my vision, I'm but a mere follower. The emperor is the one with the vision, he was bestowed powers by the Gods that will save us all."

"Bull!" Camicazi yelled.

"Shut up!" Hiccup yelled as well. "Let him talk, Camicazi."

"Emperor Dagur is going to save humanity from Ragnarok, it's not a difficult concept to grasp. Follow him and you're granted life, don't and you'll perish with the rest of his world. You should know how Ragnarok is going to pan out, you and your night fury."

Hiccup glared. He didn't know how Ragnarok was going to pan outâ€|neither did Toothless. Maybe Lizbeth would be useful?

"We need that book," Courtland continued. "Take it and you set humanity back ten hundreds of years!"

"You are so full of crap!" Camicazi rolled her eyes. "If Dagur has such a vision and so much power why does he even need weasels like you to find some dusty old books for him?" She challenged, though gave him no time to answer, she only pushed the edge of the sword further, a slit forming, leaking blood. "It's only to keep humanity in the dark, to save the cowards that will follow him blindly and leave everyone else to die. And that's who you want to protect? Well, I have a real life to save, a real dream to make come true, and real legacy to continueâ€|" Camicazi spoke boldly. The wind whipped through her hair, carrying it up as her necklaces blinked in the firelight, eyes ablaze with the passion in her words. Hiccup stared in awe, wondering why it seemed so familiar.

What are you doing making conclusions like that?:: Toothless asked as Hiccup connected wires in his brain, suddenly remembering the first dream he had in the dragon's nest months ago. The girl who had fought so courageously on the standing water, golden hair blowing in the wind. It was a rogue thought to go on, but the passion she spoke with enthralled Hiccup, and he felt a surge in him like he was in his dream again.

"I'm not some soulless ruler only interested in protecting himself in some cushy seat of power." Camicazi continued. "When Ragnarok comes the wicked will be destroyed alongside the good so don't go acting all high and mighty thinking that it'll grant you a spot at the seat of kings."

"That's herâ€|" Hiccup said to himself.

Don't be rash,:: Toothless said, but it fell to deaf ears.

"Emperor Dagur will have your head for this, Camilla." Lizbeth gagged as Camicazi's eyes furrowed even more at the word 'Camilla'. "I'll ship you all back to him. You know very well that you're wanted there." Lizbeth kept gagging.

"I'm not going to let you or any other Sanctuary Roman stop me." She turned to Hookfang. "Take em out Hookfang."

"Right-e-o!" Hookfang jumped, jutting at the guards, such a small girl bouncing on their heads as if slashing their necks one by one was a game, she landed, having taken out the dozen guards in a matter of minutes, her hook swords dripping blood and her expression high and energized.

Courtland's face was horrified and Camicazi slid close to him, side-eyeing him. "I wonder where you'll end up? Valhallaâ€|or Helheimâ€|?"

"Youâ€"" Lizbeth started but Camicazi didn't let him finish, she slit his throat.

"Helheim." Camicazi said darkly.

"No!" Hiccup yelled out, running forward but Courtland Lizbeth was already dead. Hiccup looked around, the mass of thirteen bodies all around him brought him back to Berk all in one instant and he cringed, skin clamping as he took shaky steps back, Toothless held him up.

"He could've been persuaded if we had just talked to him a little more." Hiccup cried. "He knew about Ragnarok, Camicazi, he knew the outcome. Why'd youâ€¦why'd you kill him?"

"We have to kill, Albarâ€¦you'll have to learn that if you want anything to do with Ragnarok." She tugged at Hookfang and looked at Hiccup. "Get your dragon and let's go find those books. You know where is study is, don't you?"

Hiccup nodded slowly, her hair still whipping in the wind, heroic and murderous. Passionate and deadly.

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Asha didn't seem surprised when Camicazi and Hookfang came out of the manor with bloodied swords, the books and a night fury in tow, and Hiccup with a mortified look on his face. She just pulled the cloth back over her mouth and they silently slipped out of the manor.

"Hiccupâ€¦Hiccup talk to me, what happened?" Alastair whispered as they rode back on Toothless, side by side with Stormfly but Hiccup's mind was still reeling, he kept quiet and Alastair began to yell across at the other girls.. "Hey! what did you do to my brother?"

"Nothing he won't get over by just shaking it off." Camicazi said dully. "You gotta have a thicker skin than that, kid."

"I just don't get why you had to kill Lizbeth!" Hiccup yelled across the sky. "There's already going to be enough death's with Ragnarok coming, why'd you have to kill him!?"

"I told you why already. Now sing a new song." Cami said.

"You really shouldn't have been so reckless, Cami. You know Sanctuary is already breathing down our necks as it is. We don't need to incite anything." Asha said.

"One less spy on our tail is how I see it." Camicazi seemed to just stare forward, gripping the reigns of Stormfly's saddle tightly.

"Are you okay, Hiccup?" Alastair whispered again.

"I-I don't knowâ€¦I don't like this no matter what angle it's coming from." Hiccup sighed. ..Toothless, we'll need to get you back to Johann's to treat that wound...

..No need to make a fuss over me...

..Oh stop itâ€¦ ..Hiccup sighed. ..I can tell you're in pain. They

didn't do anything else to you, did they?::

They had a hard enough time trying to keep me still, there wasn't time for them to do much else before I broke out.:: _Toothless said, a smirk in his tone, and Hiccup let out an exhale of relief. _::No need to worryâ€|you have your book back and all is well.::

Yeah, but, what about these ladies?:: _Hiccup asked, remembering Camicazi back when she was talking to Lizbeth. How she looked so similar to the girl in his dream. _::Do you sense anything from either of them? The blonde one in particular.::

Nothing odd at the momentâ€|but I haven't been around them very long to be sure.:: _Toothless didn't seem to convinced either way.

Just because they know about Ragnarok does not mean that they're anyone's dragon heart.::

Hiccup winced at the acerbity in Toothless's tone, anything having to do with the dragon heart put Toothless on edge, but it was a touchy matter that had to be dealt with.

"Regardless of what just happened we all clearly have a goal that involves these books." Asha said. "I say we take advantage of that."

"By what, traveling with a band of mysterious murderers?" Alastair spat, but Hiccup placed a hand in front of her, silencing her.

"I'll think about itâ€|" Hiccup said softly.

"We don't have time to wait around for you to 'think about it'" Cami rolled her eyes. "We've got places to go, people to save."

"He might be valuable to us, Cami," Asha whispered to her, though Hiccup heard it even over the whistle of the wind.

"The only thing valuable might be that dragon of his. The rest just seems like useless weight to me."

Hiccup bit his tongue as Camicazi kept rattling on. There went that word again.

Useless.

Hiccup didn't leave Berk to still not be taken seriously, especially not in the one thing the Gods seemed to prove that he was good at.

"Fine, I'll come with you."

_::I said don't be rash!:: _Toothless interjected. But Hiccup wasn't listening to his or Alastair's protests at that point.

"I'll just have to let Johann know that we're switching shipsâ€|"

"Johannâ€|" Asha perked up. "The merchant sailor?"

"Yeah," Hiccup nodded slowly.

"He sent word out a few weeks ago to request for Gobber."

"You know him!?" Hiccup perked up as well.

"Psh, Of course we do, he's Papa." Hookfang spoke up, still half-preoccupied with whipping the blood off of her blades.

"Papa?" Alastair chuckled.

Hiccup thought back, the older man working in the back of the forest with Fishlegs when they got to the Bog Boss's camp site. That must've been him!Gobber.

"Take me to him." Hiccup ordered.

**Whew that chapter had a lot going on from a writing standpoint. But hopefully that dumpage of info didn't fry your brain. **

But just to address some stuff on the obvious questions I'm sure are to arise after reading this chapterâ€"with all the new characters being introduced.

**Yes, Camicazi is a book character in case you didn't know, and yes, currently Hiccup thinks she's the dragon heartâ€his evidence is hardly thorough but that what he thinks for the time being.

**

Yes, Fishlegs and Gobber are part of this crew of pirates, their back stories are coming later.

**Yes, I used the name Hookfang for a character and not a dragon. It was a cool name, fit her perfectly, so I used it. And as far as the story goes a "in this story's universe" counterpart for Hookfang the dragon was nonexistent so there you go. And yes, Stromfly is the Stormfly in the books and not the movie franchise so she belongs to Camicazi and is a mood dragon and not a deadly nadder. **

Also stuff about Dagur being a roman emperor, the Sanctuary pact, and this second Ragnarok will be revealed over time so don't freak out if you're a little confused.

Alright!

Review Responses:

TheDelta724: Well it's hard to tell who's really fighting for the right cause at the moment, if anyone really isâ€*dramatic music*

Hpnarutadsjedipirate1234: We'll actually get some Ruffnut clarification soon-ish!

Wolffury: Ah, I can never resist a good HTTYD joke, no matter how corny XD, and I like that "curiosity is a gift and fault" quote, that's basically Hiccup's main plight.

92FireDemon: Can't say, but anywhere on the map is possible at this point.

Q-A the Authoress: This story is basically "Bad News: the Fanfiction", you should know that by now XD

AliceCullen3: Thanks!

Kity.0: I'm glad you like it!

Guest 1 and 2 (?): Chapter is up now, rejoice! Though for future reference I update the 1**st**** and 15****th**** of every monthâ€|or relatively around that time.**

**Guitar Amateur: Thank you! This review actually did make my day cause I've been feeling a little down lately.

**

Wishyouweremedontya: Well I'm glad this came out on your birthday! And hopefully these chapters are getting better (if not I'm not doing my job correctly). And yeah, everyone wants Astrid in a dressâ€|especially Hiccup. But Astrid's not in a dress mood right now. Maybe if Hiccup were a big more "persuasive" she would but, let's get real here, Hiccup's still reeling about her even being a girl in the first place.

**Rose: Yeah, though I'm worried it'll go by too quickly, I'm so used to just sleeping as long as I want, I don't wanna give it up! And I'm glad the chapters are getting better, I enjoy writing each one a little more than the last as well. **

Noctus Fury: Yeah, I'm sorry about that, but I still do appreciate you putting so much effort into it! And yeah, the hiccup friendship/romance/whatever you take it as is kind of the comedic crutch of the story in a lot of ways since this story is gonna keep getting kindaâ€|dark-ish?

**Next chapter keeps going into this new territory with all of these new characters! **

Also go see How to Train Your Dragon 2! It's so worth the money, and if you're reading this story then I don't know why you wouldn't go see it. I wrote a story that takes place right after the events of the sequel, so if you've already seen it, check out "Tor Rue and the Ruined" if you haven't go watch it and then read!

Next Chapter: Agile and Alike (finally at chapter 20!)

20. Alike and Agile, Part 1

**A day late but with good news. I noticed that since summer is halfway finished (for me) I've got another 6 or so weeks of free time left before art college zaps all of my free time (and my sanity). **

**So, since I want to at least finish up part 2 of this story before school starts back up I'm going to start updating this story weekly. Every Saturday this month, just to speed things up a little. Part 2 isâ€"as of right nowâ€"going up to chapter 25, and we're on chapter 20 now, so I think I can manage that. **

**Also, if you look to the top left, you might've noticed that this

story has new cover art! Done by yours truly. You can find a better version of it floating around on my DeviantArt or my tumblr if you feel so inclined to take a better look since this site's version is pretty tiny. **

Anyways, enjoy the chapter!

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter Twenty: Alike and Agile, Part 1

He worked quietly in the thick of the forest as the first peaks sunlight dusted over the grass. They all returned with the dawn, and by then the other members were stirring around the ember fire.

One girl in particular was fully awake, starting the fire back up with a army of pots and bowls around her.

"There you are," she called out to Hookfang. "What did I tell you guys about taking Hookfang out for late night missions? You know she has to catch breakfast when we're on land."

"Argh! But I'm sleepy now, Manga." Hookfang plopped back down on her sleeping linens. "Go to the market to get something."

"With what money?" Manga sighed.

Camicazi had just dismounted Stormfly before she hopped back on. "Alright, alright, if we've gotta steal something I'll get it." But Asha reached up and stopped her.

"After your little stunt at Lizbeth's I'll be doing the crafty work." Asha said.

"What'd you do?" Fishlegs asked, half excited-half worried.

"I put Lizbeth out of his misery, Asha here is acting like I didn't do the world a favor." Cami sat down, looking at Manga start the fire, boiling some water to drink. She took a bowl of water and slurped it loudly.

"How can you be casual about a human life?" Hiccup walked up, he was wide awake though Alastair was starting to nod off at his side. He left her with Toothless a few steps behind, the night fury curled around her as she slept, keeping her warm as the morning sun no longer provided any warmth. Hiccup promised they'd go back and treat Toothless's wound as soon as he talked to Gobber.

"I told you to shake it off, Albar. If you want to travel with us, you've gotta have a thicker skin than that." Cami slurped again making Hiccup twitch. He held the books closer to him.

"Oh great! You've got the books!" Fishlegs reached for them, but Hiccup kept both the dragon heart book and the book of Ranka at his chest.

"I need to talk to Gobber." Hiccup said.

"Uncle Gobber?" Fishlegs looked over his shoulder. "He's still over by the forest." He leaned over and whispered to Hiccup with a

chuckle, "every year he gets older, so his work gets slower."

"I heard that you little weasel." Gobber walked up, rubbing the crown of Fishlegs' hair. Gobber was a mountain of a man, reminding Hiccup slightly of the stature of his father, aside from Gobber having a bit more girth. Wooden teeth filled his mouth, a missing arm now replaced with a mug at the end. Hiccup raised a brow.

"Is that a detachable arm?" Hiccup asked excitedly without thinking. He had been so consumed with fixtures on Toothless's tail even back on Berk, he had forgotten what it was like to build things for fun, though he figured Gobber hadn't built a prosthetic just for fun. When Hiccup looked up he was met with Gobber's wide eyes staring him right in the face, too close for his comfort. "Uh," Hiccup swallowed.

Gobber didn't say anything for the longest time, just continuously staring at him until he finally backed away, walking back towards Manga and the fire, getting some boiled water in his prosthetic-mug and taking a swig.

"What'd I do?" Hiccup whispered to Fishlegs, and he only shrugged.

"Come here!" Gobber gestured towards the fire, cheerily patting the grass beside him. Fishlegs readily followed and Hiccup still clutched the books, walking over a little slowly.

"Now, what are you going out of the palace, Hiccup?" Gobber asked and both Hiccup and Fishlegs let out a gasp.

"What?" Fishlegs looked over at Hiccup. "What palace? Uncle Gobber what?" Gobber placed a hand over Fishlegs' chattering mouth, still looking at Hiccup. He swallowed, wondering how a southern pirate knew who he was, and by name, at that. "Go help Manga, Fishlegs." Gobber pointed to the opposite side of the fire and Fishlegs sighed, dragging his feet over to Manga's side, though Hiccup didn't miss his eyes wandering over to them through the flames.

Hiccup gulped, looking at Gobber who still took heavy sips of his water, smacking his lips and acting too casual.

"Okay, how do you know who I am?" Hiccup slammed his hand down on the ground, palms filling with dirt.

"It's not polite to answer a question with a question." Gobber removed the prosthetic-mug from his lips, smiling before his mouth opened in a hearty laugh, wooden teeth chattering. He slapped Hiccup's back with a mighty force, sending him too close to the fire. Hiccup just glowered.

"Hey come on, stop playing games, wh-who are you?" Hiccup cupped his forehead, making sure none of the hairs in front got singed by the fire.

"Better question would be who are you?" Gobber's tone turned serious again. "Albar or Hiccup?"

Hiccup crossed his arms, looking to Alastair and Toothless sleeping soundly while Asha and Camicazi still argued over who was going to

get breakfast. "Depends on who you ask." Hiccup said quietly.

"Aye, though you're crafty," Gobber nodded, "when I left Berk I didn't get a name change. But then again, I'm not a prince."

"You lived on Berk?" Hiccup raised a brow.

"16 years ago," Gobber said. "Left for the same reason you did."

Hiccup's eyes widened. "Ragnarok?"

"You brought that book with you?" Gobber's nod gave way to a smile. "Probably a better idea than to leave it on Berk with Gothi then, eh?"

Hiccup looked down at the books he still held closely to his chest. Lizbeth had said that the Dragon Heart book was a fake that only held half the truth, so maybe that's why Gobber left it?

"Were you looking for the Book of Rankaâ€|the real book?" Hiccup asked, choosing his questions carefully. Gobber's switching tones from light to heavy gave him an unsettled feeling that he could only take what he said with a grain of salt, especially given the rather colorful nature of how the members of the Bog Boss operated.

"Took my things, took my nephew and left the royal isle." Gobber pointed over to Asha. "Happened to find a girl wandering aimlessly with and old book andâ€|" he took another swig "â€"the rest was history."

"So you've known all this time about Raganarok and the dragonsâ€|?" Hiccup smiled, though he couldn't really peg the reason as to why that made him happy. All the more, Gobber shared his grin.

"Aye, we did."

"Weâ€|?" Hiccup blinked, he thought Gobber was talking about Fishlegs, but if Gobber left 16 years ago, and Fishlegs didn't look a day over 18 at best...

Hiccup looked up at Gobber, his eyes weren't focused on anyone, there was just a faraway look that he cast towards the sun. Gobber then looked at him, lifting a meaty hand and rubbed the crown of Hiccup's head.

"You've grown up there, little prince." Gobber stood, slowly, taking ginger movements to account for his missing leg as well. "Just sorry that Berk hasn't seemed to change their mind about listening."

"They will one day." Hiccup stood as well. "I'm going to find that dragon heart and everything's going to change."

"You can't change Ragnarok, Prince Hiccup." Gobber laid a heavy hand on his shoulder, the weight jostled his bones. "You can only save who you can."

"Iâ€|" Hiccup sighed. "I don't believe that. Dragons and humans don't have to live apart, Ragnarok doesn't have to tear us apart, we'llâ€|we'll find a way to unify everything I mean look at me and

Toothless." Hiccup gestured to Toothless, still sleeping soundly around Alastair, protecting her. "It's possible." He added, firm and hopeful if at all wistfully so.

Gobber turned, a tug at his lips as he took another swig from his mug. "Believe me, I know how possible it is for dragons and humans to get along." Gobber let out a little laugh. "But it amazes me how much like her you sound." Gobber said and before Hiccup could ask who "her" was, Gobber got a spoon from Manga and clanging it against his mug.

"Alright rise and shine you lazy gronckles!" He said loudly, waking the rest of the sleepers around the fire.

A small yet pudgy boy rose from his sleeping linens, smacking the sleep from his lips before looking at Hiccup with lazy eyes. A tired smile slowly pulled up his mouth. "Hello." He said cheeringly.

"Uh, hey." Hiccup waved awkwardly.

"Aw, Cami, did you guys pick up _more _strays?" Another girl rose, red hair falling over her shoulders, and sleeping wear much too revealing for Hiccup to hide his blush. She cut a glare at Hiccup and yanked up the side of her dress that had fallen off her shoulder, getting up to go yell at Camicazi some more.

"What is this, gang up on Camicazi day?" Cami rolled her eyes, shoving the red-haired girl away. "And why don't you just send Lashmed out to do it, so she can do that wholeâ€¢" Camicazi flattened her hair and batted her eyes to look like Lashmed "â€¢'Oh I'm sorry sir but I'm so beautiful you didn't seem to notice I've robbed you' routine."

"I sound _nothing _like that." Lashmed cocked her hips and narrowed her eyes.

"Can _someone _just get some food!" Manga demanded. "Or else the fire's going to go down."

"Shut up! I'm sleeping!" Hookfang added.

Hiccup couldn't help but smile at the motley crew.

"It'sâ€¢really loud in the mornings" The boy next to Hiccup said, rubbing his eyes. He extended his hand. "I'm Butterball, by the way."

"Butterballâ€¢?" Hiccup shook the boy's hand and immediately tied the strings together that he was the brother that Hookfang spoke ofâ€¢"given their strong resemblanceâ€¢"butâ€¢|Butterballâ€¢? Still, the boy's smile didn't seem to waver at the name, so if he didn't mind then Hiccup supposed he shouldn't either. And who was he to talk when he was named for being the runt of the litter?

He heard a yawn from Toothless and remembered that he did have to get back to Johann. But not without finishing this.

Hiccup stood, still tucking the books under his arm and took a pot and spoon from Manga, clanking on it in the same manner Gobber did.

"Hey!" Hiccup yelled, successful in getting everyone's attention.

"Alright, alright, we're getting your food." Camicazi said.

"No, that's not what I want. I want answers." Hiccup dropped the pot and spoon on the ground.

"Hey, I just cleaned that." Manga frowned.

"I'm not traveling with anyone, or giving up these books until you all tell me what the deal around here is."

"We already told you, we're traveling collectors." Fishlegs shrugged.

"Not that." Hiccup sighed, rubbing his temples. "You all know about Ragnarok, you have this book, these Sanctuary people are after you, but what are you actually doing?"

"I have someone I've gotta save." Camicazi stepped forward, looking down seriously. "Someone that was taken from me from all of us." Asha took Cami's hand supportively. "And Asha and Gobber here are looking for the dragon heart."

Hiccup's eyes widened. Their goals really did intersect.

"I am too." He admitted solemnly.

"We need those books to find an accurate map of Yggdrasil, so that we can find the edge of Midgard. All of our goals lead us to the edge of the world."

"Is the dragon heart in one of the other realms?" Hiccup thought, never really taking into consideration that perhaps the dragon heart might not even be in the human realm.

"Probably not." Asha said. "Though I am willing to go down Yggdrasil to Mimir's Well and gain the knowledge to find out where the dragon heart is."

"Then I'm coming with you, Asha." Hiccup stood as tall as he could, trying to look reliable. "It's my destiny."

"Oh no, coming with us is one thing but you're not going to interfere with something we've been planning for"" Camicazi started to rant, but Asha hushed her, walking slowly towards Hiccup. The girl's dark eyes searched him before she placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You can hear them as well can't you?" Asha asked with a smile. Hiccup's shoulder seemed to slacken under Asha's hand, not knowing if he was ready to reveal that to anyone who didn't already know but this group of pirates seemed to carry their own weight in secrets, and his just seemed to be added to the pile. But if Asha could speak to dragons as well then what did that mean for him?

Hiccup didn't give a clear answer before Asha simply patted his shoulder and turned, cape swinging with her movements.

"Go tend to your night fury. When you return breakfast will be served." Asha said and Hiccup nodded.

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"You two better have a good reason for missing your call time, I'm losing business, every minute counts in this!" Trader Johann yelled as soon as Hiccup, Alastair, and Toothless flew in, but his words trailed when he realized that they were both bone-tired, and Toothless was injured.

"We got into a little bit of trouble last night." Hiccup said.

"And 'a little bit' is putting it lightly." Alastair added.

"You see we ran into this guy named Courtland Lizbeth while we were selling yesterday and he mentioned that he knew about the dragon heart book and that he knew about Toothless so me and Alastair snuck out last night to meet with him but it turns out he was part of this thing called Sanctuary so they stole Toothless and I passed out but we were rescued by these pirates and then they helped me get the books back but they killed Lizbeth and apparently they're looking for the dragon heart too and they have this old book and they're going to the edge of the world and, oh yeah Gobber was there too so I guess we don't have to look for him anymore cause"" Hiccup rambled before Toothless smashed his tailed lightly against the side of Hiccup's face, smacking the words back into his throat.

_:::Your chattering is making my head hurt.::: _Toothless groaned.

"Oh and Toothless is hurt so we need to!" Hiccup let out a breath, watching Johann's face change with each sentence swell. It finally landed on a hardened and thoughtful glance at all three of them. He stroked a hand through his beard.

"So you found Gobber's ship?" Johann said.

"Yeah, he's got a whole band of children with him." Hiccup continued, but frowned as he looked over at Toothless, he really wanted to continue the conversation later after treating Toothless but Johann looked invested in knowing right at that moment.

Hiccup sighed and leaned over to Alastair.

"Take Toothless to our room, I'll be there soon." He whispered and looked back at Johann, staring him seriously in the eye. "Johann, I've decided that I want to switch ships and travel with the Bog Boss." He got straight to the point.

0o0

Hiccup returned to the room and Alastair was already treating Toothless's wound.

While off port in Lincoln the crew stayed in an inn within the town. Rooming was rather limited and although Johann hadn't said anything about Alastair's gender, Hiccup was sure he knew that he was actually a she. Still, he didn't hesitate putting them in a room together to accommodate for the funds to room the entire crew.

Knowing Alastair was a girl, though, seemed to calm the awkwardness more than make it more uncomfortable, at least he knew why she didn't want to dress in front of him, and she didn't have to always wear something that covered herself so heavily when it was just them two.

He smiled a little as Alastair worked on Toothless, even with her hair cut shorter than ever she looked more feminine as she sat there in her under-tunic. Nimfir stayed pinned to her chest, little claws digging into her shirt. They had decided to leave Nimfir when going to Lizbeths, and after all that went on Hiccup knew they'd made the right choice. Still, as he looked around, the little changewing had nervously clawed all over the bed, and as Alastair worked Nimfir clung to her like she had been gone for years rather than just a night.

::Are you alright, Toothless?:: Hiccup kneeled down, touching the dragon's skin. It was damp and hot, the long night they had proven to wear him out, and it was only now that Hiccup's mind was clear did he realize how tired the night fury actually was.

::I've had worse scars. Toothless tried to shrug it off but his eyes stayed closed, enjoying the warm cloth Alastair wiped over him.
::And what about you?:: Toothless asked.

::What about me?::

::Your back.

Hiccup blinked at the mention of it, but finally letting his own body relax from the adrenaline he remembered being slammed into the bookshelf back at Lizbeth's. The cuts on his back had been healing nicely, but the soreness of them being ruptured was starting to spread up his spine. Toothless must've felt it even before he did.

::Ah, you're right::

"Something wrong?" Alastair asked, content with working like she always was while he and Toothless communicated.

"Just my back." Hiccup stretched a little, feeling the stiffness, he cringed.

"Take off your shirt, I'll be with you in a second." Alastair instructed as business-like as possible. She took out a small jar of brewits and put it on Toothless's wound. The night fury hissed, biting his claws into the wood floor before giving a growl at Alastair, but she stood her ground, just giving him a calm eye. "I'm sorry but if you don't want it to get infected I have to put this on." She told him, rubbing his nose for good measure. Nimfir went up and licked the night fury's stab, but Alastair pulled him off before putting a longer, warm towel over Toothless's wound. The night fury simply lay on his side, relaxing after the stringing stopped.

Hiccup gulped a little when he had take off his shirt, wondering what kind of treatment he'd get if the brewit Alastair put on Toothless made even him hiss.

"Hiccup, honestly, you're so accident prone." She sucked her teeth as

she wiped down his cuts. Hiccup could already tell they had opened a little. The cut slits felt raw and stiff, the scabs broken a little.

"They're not too bad are they?"

"No, but I'll put some of this brewit on it just to make sure it doesn't get infected." She told him, taking a breath before she continued. "So how did your talk with Johann go?"

"He said he understood that we're switching shipsâ€|" Hiccup placed his hands in his lap, concentrating on the floor rather than Alastair's hands. "But I have to keep up my end of the deal."

"Which isâ€|?"

"I have to send my father a letter." Hiccup said slowly. He could've wrote it any time, preferably while they were still in the Archipelago, but he figured the longer he stalled the longer it would take to get to him.

"Do you want some helpâ€|?" Alastair asked, wringing out of the cloth.

"I guess so, I just don't know what to say. 'Hey Dad sorry I betrayed you and got half of Berk destroyed, broke out a fugitive, and then bailed on a night fury."

:::You know the destruction of your village wasn't your fault.::: _Toothless added, lifting his head to look over at Hiccup. _:::If anything it was more mine for leading them to you._:::

_:::Let's not play the blame game, Toothlessâ€|::: _Hiccup hissed a little when he felt Alastair put a little brewit on his cuts.

_:::As long as you're okay,::_Toothless continued to look at him, moving a little so his stance was more upright. _:::You saw one of those other females killing men. I know that makes you feel uneasy._:::

:::Not my favorite way to start the morning, I'll admit that. But at least I don't hear human death like I do dragon death.::: _Hiccup's hands shook as he clenched his pants tighter, hunching his shoulders while Alastair applied the last of the herbs. _:::I can only imagine what it's likeâ€|to hear a fellow human being murderedâ€|::: _Hiccup screwed his eyes shut. _:::The two men I killed to break Alastair out of the prisonâ€|:::_

:::You said you didn't know if they were dead.:::_

"Argh! They might as well have been!" Hiccup yelled, burying his head in his palms.

"Hiccup?" He felt Alastair's hand move to his shoulder. "What's wrong? What did Toothless say?"

"Nothing justâ€|everything today happened so fast and now I have to write a letter to my father and all of this destiny stuff isâ€|" he let out another groan, leaning over to scream but the yell that ripped from his throat was more from the tearing of his skin as he

leaned over.

"Hiccup!" Alastair sighed, and applied more brewit.

With warm towels on both Hiccup and Toothless, they and Alastair sat curled near the beds. Notepad and charcoal stick and tapping on the parchment as Alastair held it, letting Nimfir watch the stick go up and down, just barely out of his reach. She looked over at Hiccup.

"Okay, you tell me your thoughts and we'll get them down on paper, and then we'll form it into a letter." She recited. "Is that what you're saying?"

"Basically." Hiccup looked at the paper, a blank canvas he had to fill before he'd float away to the edge of the world. He could feel the jumble of thoughts within him but no words seemed to match with them.

:::Start with the first one, that you're sorry.::: _Toothless said, kicking his hind leg into Hiccup's side. Hiccup couldn't help but smile, though. His thoughts were a jumbled mess within his mind, but Toothless saw them all as just a pile to pick things out of.

:::Right::: _Hiccup smiled, patting the same leg that kicked him.

"Well," Hiccup said aloud. "For starters, that I'm sorry I let him down." Hiccup kept turned to Toothless, looking to him to pick the thoughts from him as he recited them to Alastair. "And that's Toothless I can't tell him that." Hiccup sighed.

"Tell him what?" Alastair asked, still writing.

"Why I'm leaving," Gobber said that no one was very interested in the dragon heart lore back on Berk, especially if it has anything to do with me trying to make sure that it doesn't tear humans and dragons apart anymore."

:::You shouldn't leave any unsaid words.::: _Toothless warned him.

:::Even I wish I had said some kinda words to mother before I left:::

Hiccup gulped and looked over at Alastair, she looked contemplative, and he knew she wanted to mention the same thing Toothless had. Alastair had lost all of her family without parting words to any of them, and there he was struggling to tell his still-alive father the truth and it wasn't even face to face.

He sat up a little, the towel on his back sagging but he didn't care.

"Tell him that I'm going to help change the world, and that I know one day he'll forgive me for betraying him." Hiccup told Alastair, watching as she wrote down each word carefully.

:::And::: _Toothless probed.

"And," Hiccup exhaled. "And that he's my family and I love

him." Hiccup let out a laugh as Toothless told him another thought. "Even Snotlout." Hiccup said. Alastair smiled as she wrote.

"I'm proud of you Prince Hiccup." She said softly, putting the charcoal down. "You're turning into quite the noble-hearted hero."

::I agree.: Toothless said, not for the first time fully understanding Alastair's words. The night fury lifted his tail, using the prosthetic fin to perk up Hiccup's chin lightly

Hiccup blushed a little at the compliments. Feeling warm and welcomed despite the sting on his cuts. In a few hours they'd be among a whole new band of people, a little later on their boat sailing to the end of the world, but for the moment he was comfortable in his little world with Alastair, Toothless, and Nimfir. It reminded him of the small landing of liberation he sought in the cove back on Berk, their little hole in the ground where everything seemed far away. But the time to run from things was over. Their world was expanding so much farther from the cove it almost terrified Hiccup.

"Okay, now let's get these thoughts into sentences." Alastair said, getting on a serious face while she turned to a new page.

Hiccup only smiled, leaning back into Toothless but then shifting his weight a little to his left, he felt Alastair stiffen against his shoulder as he pressed against it, and it got a twinge of satisfaction seeing a dusting of red on her cheeks. He looked up at her, hair lazily cut and curing around her ears, content knowing that he was the only one who would immediately spot her features as feminine in a crowd, and that no one but him would ever see her so relaxed in an under-tunic leaning against him and night fury. It was a frisson between them and Hiccup's smile only grew.

"Okayâ€|how about Dear, Fatherâ€|" Hiccup started.

They'd be on a voyage to the rims of Yggdrasil by sundown.

0o0

Their "voyage", though, seemed to start in a long trek back to the Bog Boss's ship.

"We were going to keep going inland to Nottingham before we went back to the ship," Fishlegs mentioned. "But since we have extra passengers and possibly Sanctuary agents looking for us, it's probably best we had back to The Wash."

"What's the wash?" Astrid asked.

"Where we stupidly left our ship." Manga sighed. "I mean seriously, Lashmed and I could've stayed with the boat while you guys went inland."

"Hey, what is Gamdragar, chopped yak? I'm sure he's doing a tip top job guarding the ship." Gobber hiked up his pants, walking proudly.

Astrid leaned over to Fishlegs, but the older boy seemed to have her

covered with an answer already. "Uncle's Gobber's boneknapper. We left him the guard the ship while we were away."

"The wash is a pretty shallow and flat water deposit, though we left it a little off of Skegness so no one should've found it." Cami shrugged.

"And if they do Gammy will get em before they can even wrangle a leash."

"Yeah but how'd you land a boneknapper?" Hiccup asked, and Astrid knew as he looked with excitement that he was thoroughly interested in both of the dragons that seemed accompany the Bog Boss. Stormfly took a break from flying and simply walked beside Cami for the moment and Astrid wondered if Hiccup or Toothless had spoken to the mood dragon yet.

"Cami tells the story best." Gobber smiled.

"It's true I do." Camicazi smirked, her shoulders hiked pompously and she slapped Hiccup's back. He hissed but straightened up, trying to take her slap like a man. "But story time is for the camp fire, so you'll have to wait." She added.

"No one tells stories like Cami." Fishlegs added.

"I'm sure." Astrid gave a quick grin, though she studied Camicazi carefully, not missing one detail of her as she jaunted about the crew. Hiccup had mentioned as they were packing to leave Johann and Lincoln that he thought she was the dragon heart. Though he had also mentioned Asha alluding to having the same powers Hiccup had.

Astrid was just as invested as figuring out what all the weirdness was with these pirates as Hiccup was, though she only hoped Hiccup wouldn't get too attached to any of them. It was still a fragile arrangement to be traveling with a bunch of perfect and rather sketchy strangers to apparently go beyond Midgard. Though the colorful bunch was just up Hiccup's alley, and that's what worried her the most.

"Hey Camicazi?" She heard Hiccup ask.

"Yup?" she answered.

"We're far enough out of Lincoln right?"

"I guess so|why?"

"How about a little friendly race?" Astrid turned immediately at Hiccup's proposal, she saw that fire lit behind his eyes and almost laughed when she saw the same spark in Toothless' green irises. They finally had a chance to show off, and Astrid wasn't surprised that they jumped on it.

"Well gee, I don't know if that's really fair," Camicazi threw a hand over her forehead, dramatically leaning back. "You and that fancy saddle and all."

"What?" Hiccup was already mounting Toothless. "Not man enough to race me?"

That did it.

With a single bounce of her blond hair Cami was on Stormfly's back, both girl and dragon looking just as revved up.

"Not women enough is more like it. And I'm gonna make you eat your words, freckle face."

"First one to that tree way over there and back wins." Fishlegs jumped in. "Besides it's time to start lunch anyways, right Manga?"

"I suppose so, we've gotta cook this meat that Lashmed swiped before it goes bad." Manga looked up. "Hookfang, can you cut them up into smaller pieces for cooking?"

Hookfan whipped out some smaller knives from her bag, flipping them around her fingers. "Yup," she said simply.

Astrid watched carefully between Fishlegs, Manga, and Hookfang preparing lunch and Gobber, Butterball, and Lashmed watching the race between Hiccup and Camicazi. Asha, though, was off at a distance, staring up at the sky, though not at the dragon race.

Astrid carefully made her way over to the cloaked girl, tapping her shoulder.

"You alright?" she asked and Asha seemed to snap out of whatever fog she was in.

"O-oh yes, I'm fine." Asha immediately faked a smile, though turned her attention back up to the sky, this time noticing Hiccup and Camicazi racing, her smile turned genuine. "They seem to be having fun."

"Yeah, it's nice to see Albar having some down time, it's been a rough few months for us."

Asha gave a slight nod, looking intently at the boy and his nigh fury. Their speed was undeniably surpassing Camicazi and Stormfly, but they were agile as they moved around them, the mood dragon's long body was starting to trip them up.

"They have a strong bond." Asha said, her eyes not leaving them. "It's incredible."

"Yeah, it took some time getting used to Hic-Albar and Toothless but, we're all one awkward family now."

"It must be nice to have siblings." Asha smiled.

"Oh yeah, it's great." Astrid grinned as well. She didn't really have to fake too much when it came to treating Hiccup as a brother, she did have a real brother, after all. "Though I worry about himâ€¢he's so focused on this dragon heart, I'm afraid of what he's going to get into."

"You should worry a little about yourself as well." Asha finally turned her eyes from the race, looking straight at Astrid. There was

something unsettling about her gaze, it was almost like looking Hiccup in the eye when he was serious, it drew her in but at the same time made her feel completely exposed under her watching.

Astrid gulped and the movement of her throat got Nimfir attention on her shoulder. The little changewing gave a hiss to Asha, extending his tiny claws to her.

"It's alright little one." Asha reached out, but Nimfir still hissed. "Hmm, this one is strange." She cocked her head.

"Oh you mean Nimfir?" Astrid took the little dragon off of her shoulder, cradling him instead. "He was born early. Albar thinks it might've affected his ability to communicate correctly." Astrid's eyes widened a little at her words. Hiccup had told her that Asha alluded to being able to speak to dragons as well, but never had anything been said clear cut and aloud. Asha wasn't fazed, though she did seem to sense her discomfort.

"I know nothing of my past, you know." Asha suddenly said, still trying to reach out to Nimfir, her hand coming from different angles but still to no avail. "One day I was just aware of myself, wandering aimlessly with an old book, a single mission to find the dragon heart and the ability to talk to flying beasts called dragons."

"So you don't know your parents, or where you came from?" Astrid frowned. With her dark skin and black hair Astrid would've immediately pinned her as eastern. Asha shook her head and lifted her hood over her head as a wind picked up, biting winter chill there to say.

Astrid then was with Hiccup in his claim that either Camicazi or Asha could be the dragon heart. Asha especially. But then she seemed driven by the same goal to find the dragon heart that Hiccup did. How many people were gifted in finding them?

"How long has he had the ability?" Asha suddenly asked and Astrid pulled Nimfir a little closer to her on reflex, tentative in revealing too much.

"How long have you?" Astrid countered.

"I told you, I don't know just one day I was aware of myself." Asha looked over at Astrid, brown eyes piercing through the thick shadow her hood left over her face. "I know my body was destined for nothing else but to fulfill this mission to find the dragon heart, but your brother, Albar, he's not like me, is he?"

"Wait what?" Astrid raised a brow, the girl had lost her on that one.

Asha sighed. "I've been wandering for many decades, but I never age."

"Oh come on," Astrid laughed a little. "You really expect me to believe that you're immortal?" She knew such entities existed, but definitely not on their branch of Yggdrasil.

"My mortality doesn't have anything to do with me not aging, Alastair. Being immortal is another thing entirely." Asha looked over

at her. "Is Albar?"

"Oh course not, at leastâ€|" Astrid looked up at Hiccup, the race had seemed to have ended, Camicazi smiling while Hiccup begged her for a rematch. "â€|I don't think soâ€|" Astrid took a better look. She'd only known him for a few months, but even he would mention something as big as immortality.

"It's not really something you have to think about, it's either you are or you aren't."

"Well he's not._" Astrid said firmly. "But," she took a breath, "you can both talk to dragons?"

"Yeah." Asha began to walk towards the chattering post-race crowd. "It's odd, isn't it?"

Astrid blinked. That girl was unsettling.

By the time lunch was starting it was well past high noon but Manga claimed that lunch was their big meal of the day, while breakfast and dinner simply kept them full enough until lunch.

"If we have a big enough lunch we'll be full enough to walk the night, which we might have to since it doesn't seem like there's too thick of a forest up ahead." Manga explained, squinting as she looked further north.

Astrid kept an eye on Hiccup as he sat by Camicazi. He kept asking her how her dragon worked and how she beat him and why she wouldn't do a rematch. The older girl seemed to just get a kick out of his pestering. Nimfir had passed out after eating a little fruit in Astrid's lap and, for the moment, everything seemed to beâ€|rather normal. For the first time a while.

Though Astrid still kept her guard up, keeping a close eye on her boys while she saw the spark in Hiccup's brain, knowing that while they made their way to The Wash and the Bog Boss's ship, he'd be back to practicing new tricks on Toothless. Only this time, there wouldn't be the pond in the cove for them to land in every time they fell out of the sky.

**Alright, so we're slowly moving into one of my favorite parts of the story. Start placing your bets on who the Dragon Heart is cause we've now met all of the potential candidates for it. **

More Hiccup and Cami's weird little "my dragon is better than your dragon" scrap and more on how Toothless and Stormfly get along in the next chapter!

Review Responses:

**Wishyouweremedontya: Oh the sequel is great! Definitely watch it (more than once if you can). And I'll give you a little tidbit but what's been going on with Ruffnut is cleared up in this part, so it's coming soon. Very soon actually. And Camicazi is a really fun book character, so there was no question when I planning which characters to add/exclude that she'd be a character in this story.
**

**Wolffury: I'm sure most people expected Cami to be in it, and Dagur was mentioned as Emperor before this whole mess with Lizbeth, actually, but it was in passing so some people might've missed that. And Gobber's got a lot under his sleeve in connection to Hiccup, that'll be revealed as the story progresses. **

**Kitty.0: Yeah a lot's been going on lately, next chapter is a bit slower on the information overload. And nah, the group sticks together as much as they can help it. **

Q-A Authoress: Good news is always covered with a million new and unanswered questions XD

92FireDemon and AliceCullen3: Thank you!

**Demigod of Nyx: Stormfly is not a Norse dragon she actually comes from the Roman area, soâ€|no. But, dragons don't speak in different languages like humans do in this story, so it doesn't really matter what part of the world they come from. But there'll be some actually Stormfly/Toothless communication next chapter. **

Rose: Well I wouldn't say sleeping is my favorite hobby, but I do enjoy it XD And there's a lot of new characters floating around now, but every character who **_*_might **_*_**be the dragon heart has been introduced as of now, so you can definitely start narrowing it down. I always get a kick out people's predictions. And Gobber and Fishlegs have a pretty interesting story, though that'll be revealed more in depth over time. **

**Flopsy rabbit: Haha, I'm glad it's suspenseful! **

Draco Wolves: Thank you very much! And since there's two different universes in the httyd franchise (book and movies) it's cool to drag and drop from both. **_*_But **_*_**that doesn't mean that some original characters aren't in this story as well. Such as Asha, she's not in the books or movies, but we'll most definitely learn more about her over time, she's a very important character.
**

**Krazikidz: Why yes, Stormfly will be in the storyâ€"book Stormfly, though, not movie Stormfly. Nimfir is more or less "Astrid's dragon" in this story. **

Noctus Fury: It always does get dark quickly, doesn't it? XD And while picking the villains for this story I had a lot to pick from with the books and the movies and the tv show, while the original villain was actually supposed to be Book!Alvin in the earlier blue print to this story, I decided to go with Dagur instead, his character provided the better and more reasonable back story for the plans I had for the Roman Emperor in this story. You'll get why when Dagur's story is finally revealed later on. And, I wouldn't really say that Astrid would get jealous in the way you guys probably think. In those terms she's more of a Mikasa-type character (if you've seen the anime "Attack on Titan", I guessâ€|)

Okay so we're seriously going to try out this once a week thing, so we'll see if I can make it by the 5**th****. **

See you then! (hopefully XD)

Next Chapter: Alike and Agile, Part 2

21. Alike and Agile, Part 2

Two hours to spare but look who actually got this up 4 days after the last update! (None of you thought I was gonna pull it off did you? Cause I know I didn't).

Part Two: We Are Searching for Significance

Chapter Twenty-One: Alike and Agile, Part 2

Hiccup looked as Stormfly's skin crept to an orange-pink while Camicazi fed her a few fish. The dragon let out a playful hiss, licking the blonde until the hair over her forehead slopped up, curling at the ends.

Hiccup simply leaned against Toothless, watching the two during their normal lunch break. He took a bite and sucked on his plum.

_:::Do they really expect me to eat such little food?::: _Toothless asked, picking at his fruit as he had already eaten all of the fish he was given in two bites.

:::Toothless, you say this every day.

:::And every day I still get tiny human pickings of food. the night fury snuffed, blowing little puffs of smoke around his apples.

:::Eating fruit won't kill you, you know. Hiccup said as he looked down at his own food. He always ate the lightest lunches of a bunchâ€"so Manga saidâ€"mostly just being satisfied with a carrot, an apple or plum, and a little wheat porridge. He looked over by the fire watching Alastair as she had taken to helping preparing lunch with Manga, Lashmed, and Hookfang, mentioning something about not wanting to laze around while being in such a large group.

But Hiccup still sighed at the fact that he was so used to being waited on. He barely knew how to cook anything, and was only good at catching fish for Toothless. But since they were nowhere near water, and had to ration their fish between two hungry and fine-growing dragons, his fishing skills weren't exactly known.

At least when he was on Johann's ship, he was busy making Toothless's tail, but now that he had no project to work on he feltâ€"useless again, to say the least.

:::Don't feel so down. Toothless told him, nudging his side.
:::We've only been with these humans for a week, you'll find your place in no time.

:::Thanks for the optimism. Hiccup grinned, not knowing whether he wanted to mope or believe Toothless's optimism. But still, he looked over at Stormfly and Camicazi, they had clearly been together longer than he and Toothless had, and he almost envied their closeness. Though, Hiccup wonderedâ€|

_:::Hey, what's Stormfly like?::: _Hiccup asked.

:::Why don't you find out for yourself?:::

:::I'm a little scared to talk to her, I mean, what if she says something to Camicaziâ€or to Asha?:::

_:::Under the assumption they can communicate with our kind, of course.::: _Toothless corrected him. _:::I still have yet to have a conversation with either of these females.:::_

:::Well I'm almost sure that Asha can, at least, that's what Alastair told me. But still, you're a dragonâ€!:::

_:::Really? I hadn't noticed.::: _Toothless curled back down into his forearms.

_:::No,::: _Hiccup laughed, giving the night fury a light slap. _:::I mean, haven't you said anything to her?:::_

:::Not really.:::

_:::Why not?::: _Hiccup lifted a brown, genuinely shocked.

:::Why should I? I have no reason to speak with her.:::

Hiccup sighed. It wasn't until Stormfly came into the picture that Hiccup realized Toothless only had him, Alastair, and Nimfir for friends. Two humans and a dragon that couldn't communicate with other dragons. And he didn't seem to have too many friend back at the dragon's next near Berk eitherâ€!

_:::I don't really need further companionship, if that's what you're wondering.::: _Toothless huffed, though it didn't feel like he was casually dismissive as usual, he seemed more apprehensive, nervous even. Hiccup took a last bite of his plum before he threw the seed at the night fury's head. Toothless shot up, glaring at him, but Hiccup saw the need to change the subject written all over his face.

:::You're nervous aren't you?:::

:::That's ridiculous.:::

_:::But I'm right, aren't I?::: _Hiccup smiled. The thought of Toothless being nervous about something as trivial as making a new friend left him feeling somewhat giddy. Almost like it was a problem Toothless had that he could actually solve, or at least help with.

Toothless kept silent, his ears curling in and his claws biting into the dirt.

_:::Toothlessâ€!::: _Hiccup probed, trying to bite his lip to hide the excitement bubbling forth.

_:::You're not fooling anyone, I know this thrills you.::: _Toothless rolled his eyes.

_:::Oh, don't make this about me, justâ€": _Hiccup looked over at Stormfly, curling around Camicazi as she watching the clouds roll over her, crunching loudly on her apple. _:::â€"Why don't you just go

talk to her? I'll be right there with you.:::_

_:I'm not a hatchling.::: _Toothless got up, shaking the dirt off of himself and trying to stand tall. _:I don't need your assistance in such a simple task.::: _Toothless began to walk away, leaving his little bit of picked-over fruit in the grass behind Hiccup. The night fury turned half way to his destination, eyes shifting. Hiccup smiled, getting up as well and giving Toothless a pat.

_:See, I told you that you were nervous.::: _Hiccup said.

:Justâ€|tell me what I should say.:::

_:Umâ€|hello?::: _Hiccup bit his lip. _:I mean, if that's how dragons do things, I guess. I only know about human stuff.:::_

Stormfly noticed them first as they approached, she turned her head into the grass, looking at them upside down.

_:Ugh, the human boy and his demon.::: _She scoffed and tugged the leg of her rider. Camicazi grinned wryly.

"Ready for another beating?" She asked smugly. "That would make it, what? 15 to 4?"

"You don't have to bring up the races every time we talk you know." Hiccup sighed. He and Cami had been racing all week, but he'd only manage to win 4 out of the 19 races they had done. Toothless was faster, of course, but Stormfly and Camicazi were deft in the sky, maneuvering better than anything he had seen. He and Toothless had even thrown a few races, trying to observe their movements, but Hiccup was sure Stormfly's snake-like body wasn't something Toothless could really imitate.

Camicazi just let out a good-natured laugh, arms moving to her stomach. Hiccup nudged his elbow roughly into Toothless's side.

_:Come on, say something.::: _Hiccup urged.

_:Um, hello.::: _Toothless perked up, letting out a small growl as he tried to seem friendly, but Stormfly didn't seem interested. Toothless looked at Hiccup, defeat all over him, it was almost pitiful. _:She called me a demon.::: _Toothless whispered.

:Okay soâ€|we'll try approach two.:::

:Which is what?:::

_:I can hear you both.::: _Hiccup heard Stormfly's voice butt in.

_:Oh umâ€|::: _Hiccup gulped, forgetting that dragons could hear him as well.

_:We're sorryâ€|::: _Toothless started to turn away but Hiccup kept him there.

_:::Do you have a problem with us?::: _Hiccup asked, point-blank.
:::Your human seems to like us, so why don't you?:::

_:::I have no problem with humans specifically.::: _Stormfly said.
_:::Though I don't care to get mixed up in the mess you two are
associated with.:::_

_:::Mess we're associatedâ€|whatâ€"?::: _Hiccup stepped forward but
Toothless put his tail in front on his steps.

_:::Let's go.::: _Toothless said, sternly and without a second thought
he turned away, bringing his wing to Hiccup's back to move him with
his motions.

_:::Hey come on Toothless, you don't have to take that.::: _Hiccup
sucked his teeth, looking over his shoulder as Camicazi blissfully
stared at the clouds while Stormfly kept her gaze on them, turning
darker shades of blue as her glare narrowed.

_:::Best not agitate this for now.::: _Toothless said. _:::But this is
why I don't make friends.::: _

:::Iâ€|::: Hiccup wanted to protest, to make a comeback that would
derail all of Toothless's worry but whatever was going on was beyond
him. As usualâ€|

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"Hey!" Hiccup pouted as Manga pulled a carrot from his grasp, putting
it back in their supply basket.

"Sorry Albar, but we're low on carrots."

"We're low on everything." Lashmed sighed as she unpacked her
sleeping linens for the night. "We really should've made that extra
trip to Nottingham before going back to the ship."

"You know Nottingham is filled with Sanctuary estates." Fishlegs
said. "We made the right choice."

"Not for our guts though." Hookfang plopped down on her sleeping
linens, sneaking the carrot out of the basket and crunching on
it.

"Okay, okay." Asha stepped in. "Two of us will try and find a spare
farm." She squinted as she looked out to the last of the setting sun
over the horizon. "There's gotta be someone along these flat lands,
they're perfect for harvest."

Hiccup immediately looked up, he felt Alastair's hand at his wrist
but shook it off.

"I'll do it." Hiccup volunteered. Everyone turned and looked at him,
raising a brow.

"No offense but after what happened with Lizbeth, I'm not sure you're
the scout and retrieve type." Camicazi said, not in a particularly
hurtful or even teasing tone. She was sincere and to-the-point, and
that's what slapped Hiccup the most. "Stealing food along the flats
can get kind of messy."

"Well does anyone else here have a night fury that's basically invisible at night?" Hiccup bargained. "We're perfect for the job."

Everyone was silent for a moment and a little sweat broke out on the back of Hiccup's neck, his confidence dropped quickly.

"Alright," Asha shrugged. "But Cami goes with you."

Hiccup gave Camicazi a side glance, and she smirked at him, shoulder's rising.

"I-I'll got too." Hiccup heard Alastair interject.

"Nope, too many people." Asha said. "Besides, you're more helpful with dinner."

"Butâ€"!"

"Hey, come on Alastair I'll be fine." Hiccup said, taking a knee to look at her. "I can take care of myself, you don't have to be such aâ€|. he trailed.

"What?" Alastair bit back. "Such a what?"

"Nothing." Hiccup shook his head, looking down at his boots. The tension snapped when Hiccup received a light slap on the back on his head, Cami looking at him so that they could get on Toothless.

"Come on freckle face, I don't feel like being out all night."

"Yeah, coming." Hiccup got up as well, though Alastair's hand kept him there.

"Hiccup," she said quietly.

"Alastair, I'll be fine." He told her, his tone had more of a bite to it.

She leaned back a little, jumping at the sudden acerbity in his tone. Still it was written all over her face that she didn't believe him, and that just made Hiccup burn. He was surrounded by women. Even Gobber, Fishlegs, and Butterball seemed respectfully submissive in letting them be the leaders, but Hiccup wanted to be respected as well.

Hiccup shrugged Alastair's wrist away, his glare keeping her quiet enough that he knew he didn't have to say anything else.

Why don't you ever talk to me before you make these rash choices? Toothless sighed as Hiccup mounted him. I'm a little sleepy.

I am too. Hiccup yawned for emphasis. But we've got something to prove to these girls.

Do we now?

_{:Yesâ€|:: _Hiccup adjusted his foot into Toothless's stirrup, looking at Cami as she said her goodbyes to Stormfly and said a few words to Asha.

"Come on," He called out to her. "I don't feel like being out all night." Hiccup looked over at the blonde, trying to copy her wry grin.

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It was about two hours into the night when Hiccup began to get tired. The determination to be at his best faded when all they were met with was open skies and farm-less grounds.

Camicazi held loosely onto him as they flew on Toothless, and Hiccup was immediately noticing the difference between having Alastair ride with him and having Camicazi behind him. She didn't seem as scared, her grip wasn't as tight, her chest didn't press as closely to his back. Though Hiccup was slightly grateful for that, Camicazi was a few years older than Alastair was, after all. The last thing he needed was _that _much distraction while flying.

"Hey, if we don't find anything in another half hour we should turn back." Camicazi told him. "Or else we'll be flying back all night."

"I know that." Hiccup said, staring forward, his eyes narrowing when he heard Camicazi's chuckle over the wind.

"What's your deal tonight? Pants too tight?"

"I justâ€|know how to do things without you tell me." Hiccup clutched the Toothless reigns harder as they flew.

"Oh well excuse me," a laugh ruffled Camicazi's chest. "I didn't realize your balls had dropped today."

Hiccup had enough at that point.

"What's _your _deal?" Hiccup yelled. "All you do is walk around like you're better than me."

"Pfft, maybe that's how you see it."

"It's not just me." Hiccup started but he felt Toothless's tug at his thoughts.

_{:Don't bring me into this.:: _Toothless said, his tone was dead serious and Hiccup swallowed back his words.

"Look kid, I don't know you too well, but what I _do _know is that respect is earned around here. I've had to earn it and everyone in the Bog Boss has had to earn it. You've only been here a week and you expect everyone to treat you like you're already apart of this family. Just who do you think you are?"

Hiccup felt the sting as she spoke, even Toothless winced a little. He bit his lip and kept quiet as they both continued to look for any kind of farmlands on the ground, and just when they were about to turn around empty handed Toothless's ears shot up, his irises to

slits.

_::What is it?:: _Hiccup asked.

_::A dragon is coming, just east of here.:: _Toothless flapped forward, drawing back.

"What's wrong?" Camicazi asked.

"There's another dragon in the air" Hiccup replied, looking to see the monstrous nightmare fly right over them, its wind breaking their steady float.

_::He's heading somewhere:: _Hiccup said, the dragon's motives seeming very home-bound.

::I agree.::

They both glanced at each other, turning to follow the nightmare.

"That dragon's heading somewhere." Hiccup said back to Camicazi.

"In these parts he's probably wild." Camicazi told him.

"Or maybe not. I say we follow him for a little while, just to see where he's going." Hiccup didn't wait for a response, he was already on the nightmare's trail.

The nightmare flew due west for another good 20 minutes before he started descending, and on the ground it was clear that a house was coming in from the distance.

A large estate, farmlands included, acres of territory behind the mansion each section fenced and caged in iron bars that jutted from the ground. At least 50 dragons were housed behind the estate, most of them sleeping, though others restless.

The nightmare landed, in front of the house, greeted by a man that put a chain around his neck and began to bring him around back.

"What's such a huge place doing stuck out here in the middle of nowhere?" Hiccup wondered.

"Dragon slave house." Cami's tone narrowed as much as her gaze. "He's probably collecting them to sell in the market towns." Hearing the definition left just as much of a bad taste in his mouth then it did when Hiccup first learned of the Saxon's treatment of dragons.

"He's got a farm though," Camicazi continued, shrugging.

"Then I say we go for it." Hiccup said, turning to smile at Camicazi. "Who knows, we might even be able to do a little liberating while we're getting some food."

"Liberating, eh?" Cami played along, matching his grin. "I'm way ahead of you freckle face."

Hiccup rounded the edge of the edge of the gates, stepping lightly as to not wake the dragons just sleeping on the other side. He peaked through the bars, seeing beyond the cages of dragons farming fields.

"What are we looking at?" Camicazi hissed, hurrying him along.

"I see some onions, pigs, cows, cabbages..." Hiccup squinted to get a better look. "A lot of cabbages, And I guess those are carrots."

"Anything we can swipe and run?" Cami asked, getting her swords ready.

"Probably the onions and cabbages," Hiccup's nose wrinkled at the thought. "Though everyone's breath is going to stink if that's all we're eating."

Cami elbowed the back of Hiccup's head. "Be picky someplace else. Food is food, now get your swords ready."

Hiccup sighed, and took the butterfly swords Hookfang gave him out of his bag, latching them into the belt of his tunic. He still didn't feel particularly comfortable using anything but a dagger, but he was given swords, so that's what he would use.

"You grab as many things as you can stuff in thisâ€"" Camicazi shoved a brown sack into his chest. "Then get in the air on Toothless."

"Should I just fly over on Toothless?" Hiccup asked.

"Nah," Camicazi looked upwards, pointing to a few guard towers around the rims of the estate. "They probably won't spot us hopping the fence, but they'll sure notice a night fury swooping down over the fields."

"Okay, so then what are you gonna do?" Hiccup sucked his teeth.

"I'm going to free these dragons." Camicazi said seriously, whipping her swords through the air in practice. "Just do what I told you, okay?"

Hiccup growled but Toothless nudge him forward.

_:::Don't be stubborn.::: _Toothless told him and Hiccup sighed as the night fury reached up on his hind legs, helping Hiccup get over the fence.

_:::Wait here until I get back with the food.::: _Hiccup told him and ran swiftly around the cages. All of them seemed to be just as exhausted as the next, though some where in a deep sleep while others were still awake. Hiccup wondered as he ran what kind of things went on in a dragon slave house to make them so exhausted, though he did remember Lizbeth and even Johann mentioning dragons being used for working purposes. Those dragons probably worked the field just as hard as any worker did.

_:::I don't recognize this one.::: _Hiccup heard one of the dragons

say.

_:::New human.::: _Another called out.

:::Free us!:::

He stopped short, looking around at the cages and frown when he spotted a thunderdrum within one of the pens. It's large mouth was muzzled and only it's whimpers filled Hiccup's ears.

_:::Free us pleaseâ€|:: _Hiccup hear the dragon say, and he placed his hands on the bars, tempted to reach inside.

_:::Camicazi's coming to save you.::: _He told the thunderdrum.

:::Don't worry.:::

_:::You-youâ€|speak like us?::: _

"Albar, get moving!" Hiccup heard and spun around to see Camicazi trying to pick at one of the locks with the tip of her sword, cursing lightly each time it failed to open. "Get moving!" She hissed again for emphasis.

Hiccup hurried up and climbed over the next fence out to the fields. Acres of farmlands rolling hill over hill. He started filling the sack with cabbages and onions and was able to get a few carrots that were further down.

In a dirt patch within the field while Hiccup was getting some carrots, though, he happened upon a small shed. A sparse candle light was flickering inside, an old man asleep with a book over his eyes seemed like he was the lone soul inside. Though a grumble further in the shed let Hiccup know that the man had a watch-dragon station inside, a hotpurple snoozing just as loudly as the man was.

Hiccup looked around inside the shed, nothing of interest worth taking but a few jars of milk over on the far table.

All they had was water sacks that they boiled every day and a few barrels of honey-mead (that Gobber, Camicazi, and Lashmed consumed the most of), but milk was always good as well. Hiccup put the sack down, opening the door slowly and winced as it creaked. Tip-toeing inside, the man and dragon only snoring louder as he moved slowly towards the jars.

He took each one and tucked them in his arms, turning on his heel before he noticed a ring of keys on the other table the man was leaning on.

They could've been keys to just about anything, but Hiccup was certain that it was for the dragon cages.

Hiccup smiled as he stepped forward over the snoring hotpurple and curved his arm around the sleeping man, he was skinny enough to do it without waking either of them up, but his arms were just shy of being long enough. Tongue out and a bead of sweat running down his neck, Hiccup put his palm to the floor and leaned on one knee, the keys just barely grazing his fingertips before he looked up and saw an eye open underneath a fur of eye brows and facial hair. Hiccup immediately gasped, dropping the milk jars all over the man's

shoes.

The old man's mustache curled up as he groaned and the man grabbed the keys and hopped up in a spring that defied his age.

"Wh-what ya doing in 'er?" He stammered, reaching shakily for what looked like a horn on the wall. Hiccup's eyes widened. Not knowing whether he should make a run for it or still try and get the keys from the man. But the sleeping hotpurple woke up at that moment, limiting Hiccup's options quickly. The large dragon moved slowly but Hiccup could already see him reaving up to blast him.

"I-Iâ€¢!" Hiccup bit his lip, eyes cutting over to the sack of food, and cursed himself when the man's eyes followed.

"You dirty thief." The man growled and took the horn to his mouth, blowing harshly. The sound was dull in the room but echoed over the fields. That man was no doubt a watchman for the field. Something that big and prosperous in the middle of nowhere was sure to be a prime target for hungry thieves.

The hotpurple let out a messy blast and set half the shed in a dripping inferno, Hiccup just barely making it out the door, grabbing to sack of swiped food and round the corner of the shed, hoping over cabbage patches while the old man was on his heels and the hotpurple flew lazily behind.

"Get back 'er ya thief!" He called out, keeping up with Hiccup for all it was worth.

_:::Toothless!::: _Hiccup called out, hoping Toothless wasn't too far away for their link not to work.

_:::I'm a little tied up at the moment,::: _Toothless answered back, a struggle in his voice. _:::Seems the humans are onto us._

_:::Yeahâ€¢ that might be my fault.::: _Hiccup gave out a nervous laugh before he lost his footing, tripping on onion leaves, the cabbages and carrots in the sack spilling over his head.

A bumpy and heavy weight crushed Hiccup further into the ground, the hotpurple's body sank over him in a tackle. The man walked up, hands on his hips and mustache twisting in a frazzle.

"I'll turn ya straight to the dragon pins for trying to steal the master's food." He said.

_:::Hey come on, you're heavy!::: _Hiccup tried to communicate with the hotpurple instead, slapping the ground as he tried to move.

_:::Huhâ€¢ speak like me?::: _The dragon tilted his head.

_:::Yeah, yeah, I can,::: _Hiccup coughed a little. _:::Now please get off of me, we're trying to save the other dragons._

Hiccup could feel the thought tinkering through the horpurple's mind. Just as slow as it's movements. But it seemed to be in good favor of Hiccup.

"Albar!" Hiccup heard Camicazi in the background before he saw a perfectly thrown knife land right in the old man's shoulder. He gasped a little, dropping to the ground.

His age put him out of commission though Hiccup didn't think he was dead, even as Camicazi walked up pulling the knife from his shoulder. She shook her head as she saw Hiccup tackled by a hotpurple.

_::Come on get off me.:: _Hiccup placed his face in the dirt, sighing, and the dragon finally lifted its gut off of Hiccup's back.

He expected Camicazi to laugh, but instead she grabbed his shirt roughly and pulled him up to look at her.

"What the hell did you do?" Cami hissed.

"I just thoughtâ€œ|I could get the keys from that guy to help you unlock the dragon cages." Hiccup panted.

"Uh huh, and where are the keys?" She cocked a hip when Hiccup grinned sheepishly, pointing back to the half on-fire shed in the distance.

"Albar I swear, I'm gonna kill you." She grabbed the flattened sack of food and shoved it into stomach before taking his hand and tugged him along as they ran through the fields, the hotpurple left in the distance.

They were just up to the fence that blocked the fields from the dragons, but a line of torches and guards man was already lining the rim. He heard Cami curse under her breath. "All the guards are up now, you know, we're gonna have to bail without freeing any of the dragons." She told him.

"What!? No I already promisedâ€œ|" Hiccup cut his sentence short, not really able to tell Camicazi that he had promised the thunderdrum that they would be freed.

Camicazi wasn't in the mood to argue, though. She put a hand in front of Hiccup. "Get over the fence with the food and I'll take care of them." She told him.

"At least let meâ€œ|" Hiccup tried to protest but Cami sent him a glare that cut sharp ice through his skin. He shivered and swallowed the rest of his sentence.

Crossbows shot towards them and Camicazi whipped out her sword, blocking the arrows with precision as she got in front of Hiccup, ramming her way through the air as it spit arrows at them. The metal hitting metal shook Hiccup's teeth while Cami collided with the cross bows, slashing wrists and ankles in clean strokes of her sword.

"Hop to it, Albar!" She called and Hiccup threw the sack over his shoulder, trying to hold it up with his teeth as he had to use both hands to climb the fence. But all the cabbages, carrots, and onions he swiped seemed good while taking but bad when he had to pull all that weight over a fence.

He only had one foot to the third bar of the fence when he felt a hand grab his ankle, and guard took out a knife and shoved it in Hiccup's boot.

The boots Alastair had gotten him with thick for winter, but he still felt the knife at his skin, his flesh sunk around the sharp edge and he felt the wetness of his blood seeping onto the inside of his boot. The sack of stolen food felt from his teeth and grasp and he let out a hiss before his feet slipping from the barring. The man pulled him down the rest of the way, grabbing the sack of food and raising his knife. Hiccup reached shakily for his butterfly swords, only managing to get one out to block the man's jab. He really didn't know how to use those types of swords, and used it more as a shield than anything else. He saw a few openings to slice the man's neck, but all Hiccup could see when thinking to do it was how Camicazi just killed Lizebeth the previous week, and it made his stomach churn. The pain in his leg was starting to effect his wherewithal and just as his vision started to get fuzzy from the adrenaline of blocking a knife and the pain shooting up his leg Hiccup heard the man give a yelp before falling forward.

His body fell against Hiccup's and he saw a dagger wedged in his back. Camicazi right there.

"Come on." She muttered darkly, helping him over the fence to the dragon's cages. They had one more fence to scale to get out, but Hiccup smiled when he saw that Toothless was already waiting for them.

_:::Hurry up!::: _Toothless called out, worry in his words as he fought off some guards that were trying to detain him, doing his best to fend them off without killing anyone. Camicazi picked Hiccup up and carried him the rest of the way, though as they passed by some of the cages, Hiccup saw the thunderdrum he had spoken to.

_:::Free usâ€|?::: _The thunderdrum pleaded.

_:::Iâ€|::: _Hiccup sighed as Cami ran right past the dragon, hoisting Hiccup over her shoulder and giving a quick slash to anyone who tried to get in their way of getting to Toothless.

:::Free meâ€|?::: the dragon asked again, but Hiccup couldn't do anything, even as they ran more guards were coming quickly. They mounted Toothless in the thicket, Camicazi yelling to get a move on and they took off.

_:::I'm sorryâ€|::: _Was all Hiccup could say.

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Camicazi tore from the cloth off of the food sack, soaking it in their drinking water to clean it off before wringing it out as best she could, getting it dry enough to wrap.

Toothless licked the stab on Hiccup's leg while Cami did that, their camp fire only letting out a few embers and a small line of smoke into the sky as they stopped for the night, too tired to continue back to the other members of the Bog Boss.

"Shouldn't we be hiding out in the thickets?" Hiccup asked, not

knowing why Camicazi choose to make camp out in the flat lands rather than finding at least a little bit of brush to hide in.

"Nah, they'll be searching anything dense all night. Stay one step ahead and hide where they're not expecting us to."

"Wellâ€¦how do we even know those guys were Sanctuary?"

"Don't know, but they're ritzy guards in a ritzy estate with nothing else better to do than track down a couple of food thieves all night."

Hiccup heard Cami suck her teeth as she looked at the food he had managed to bring back. He had swiped a lot more, but between tripping on the onion grass, getting trampled by a hotpurple, and getting dragged down by that guard, half of the food had fallen out or gotten squished.

"Geez, all of that ruckus for half a bag of flat cabbage and onions." Cami shook her head and dug around a little. "And one carrot," she laughed bitterly. "This'll last us another day at best."

"I'm sorry," Hiccup said lightly, trying to let Toothless's licking sooth him rather than having the stress of the situation tighten his skin.

"Yeah well, maybe next time you'll do what I tell you."

"I was just trying to help." Hiccup sat up, trying to make a convincing argument, but his guilt weakened his tone. "And we did get _some _food." He still tried.

"That's not that point, Albar. We have ten people to feed and three dragons, you can't think about taking chances that aren't necessary. You do what you have to get what everyone needs and you get out."

"Well then how come you wanted to free the dragons? Why didn't you just help me get the food so we could leave?" Hiccup challenged her, smiling when she raised a hand to bite back but was at a loss for words. She slapped the damp cloth on Hiccup's ankle and he winced.

"Wrap it yourself." She told him, chewing her cheek. "Since you're the man and all."

"You don't have to be soâ€" "

"I can be whatever I want." Cami spat back at him. "You're not fooling anyone with all that English traveling crap." She rolled her eyes. "I know that Norse twinge in anyone's voice. You're a Viking."

Hiccup's eyes widened. Gobber had been pretty quiet about Hiccup being royalty. Not even Fishlegs knew too much. But Camicazi did say Vikingâ€¦not Viking Prince.

"They're all Romanized over there too." She shook her head. "I know how you treat your women. And that might be what you're used to, but when you travel with us regardless of whatever Ragnarok destiny you

have with Asha, everyone earns their keep equally. And made a pretty poor performance tonight." She said, pointing to Hiccup's swords in his belt.

There was a silence between them as Hiccup wrapped the cloth around his ankle, his spinning thoughts drowning out the stinging.

"Aren't you Romanâ€|?" He felt it right to ask, remembering to what Lizbeth had called her: Miss Imperiosus.

He saw the twitch on Camicazi's eyes when he asked that. She didn't turn to look at him, she just kept her gaze on the horizon. The sun would be up in another hour or so, leaving everything as dark as ever.

"I used to be." She said slowly as her figure fell into the shadows of the grass. "Get some sleep," she told him. "We'll need your leg so you can fly back."

Hiccup looked down, his wrapped leg was sore, it stung but it wasn't that bad. The wounds on his back were worse than the puncture. He kept his boot off for the moment, letting his feet rest on Toothless.

He could feel the night fury's gaze on him, but he remained silent, already knowing all the things Toothless would say.

_:::I know, I knowâ€|::: _Hiccup sighed.

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Astrid didn't get too much sleep that night. She was picking at her bowl of wheat porridge from hours ago, Manga giving up on washing her bowl before bed.

The fire was down to nothing but embers and a few trails of smoke, and Nimfir was fast asleep on her stomach, but all Astrid thought about was what Hiccup had said to her.

She felt a tightness at her chest whenever she felt him pulling away. Even though she knew he wasn't doing it on purpose. She knew just part of Hiccup being Hiccup was his never ending struggle to get everyone to respect himâ€"the whole world if he could. How he always felt any new person he met he had to work twice as hard to get them to notice his significance. She _knew _that he hated her babying him.

But she couldn't help itâ€|

"Getting worried?" She heard Asha over her and focused her eyes to her side. Stormfly was looking up at the sky as well, waiting patiently for her rider to return. "It should be morning soon."

"They should've been back by now." Astrid shared her worry. She didn't waste too much time getting up, Nimfir squirmed around as she pulled him off of her stomach. "Do you think Stormfly would mind if I rode her?"

"Don't you think that's a little rash?" Asha said.

"No...I don't." Astrid was already walking towards the mood dragon. She touched her side and Stormfly turned her gaze to Astrid. It was sharp, but worried, and Astrid seemed to connect with her on the grounds that they both wanted to go and see what was taking their friends so long.

Astrid was surprised that worked, but watching Hiccup and Toothless communicate so much with eye contact she was glad she had picked up a thing or two.

"You should come as well, Asha." Astrid said. "So that Stormfly's flying with someone familiar."

Asha turned and exhaled, though, looking back at the sleeping pirates around the fire. "I hate to leave them here without saying anything."

"Don't you worry." Gobber suddenly said. His eyes were still closed but a smile grazed his lips. "Papa will hold down the fort while you're gone."

"Thank you Gobber." Asha bowed her head a little before she mounted Stormfly, Astrid not too far behind.

She had planned to leave Nimfir at the camp, but he clung to her fiercely, still spooked from how long she stayed away without warning when she and Hiccup got mixed up with Lizbeth.

"Okay, you can come, but only if you stay put and stay quiet." She told him, placing a shushing finger over his chattering mouth. She looked at Asha as she flew Stormfly, not making too much conversation. "Iâ€œ!" Astrid started, only wanting to say a few things. "I told you I should've gone with them." She said. "Albar and Camicazi alone on a mission sounds like a bad combination."

"He has to learn his own independence." Asha said. "He can't have his big brother protecting him all the time."

"You justâ€œdon't understand." Astrid sighed. Knowing there were plenty of truths in Asha's words, but there was still the kind of logic that Astrid ran onâ€œthe one she couldn't ignore. "Albar, Toothless, Nimfirâ€œthey're all I've got. I'd rather he be a little annoyed with me and safe thanâ€œwell than the other alternative." Nimfir chattered a little, but quickly quieted himself and Astrid gave his chin a little scratch.

"Give him a little more credit." Asha said softly, her hood staying over her face as usual, but Astrid could practically hear the smile in her voice. "I'm sure it's hard enough for him as it is, being so different."

"I guessâ€œ!" Astrid sighed. When it came to Hiccup's journey and all of the dragon heart business, there wasn't much she could do for him other than be there for him and keep him out of harm's way.

Sometimes protecting him felt like the only thing she for sure knew she could do for him.

But then, Astrid smiled, remembering that there were those moments in

which he saved her as well. She remembered when she went back to Merkskof, and how he and Toothless wrapped themselves around her, keeping her warm and making her feel loved and safe after losing the last of her family. That was all she wanted for them, Astrid thought, wrapping her own arms around herself, trying to relive that moment.

But her own gentle hug was contrasted fiercely when she felt the tension of thick and scratchy bola ropes grip around her. Her vision turned into a swirl as they all crashed into the ground, her head and neck cracked harshly and her arms dug into her sides as they hit the ground, her eyes darted around, looking to see a bunch of men landing from muzzled and saddled Monstrous Nightmares.

"Sanctuary?" Astrid asked Asha in a whisper.

"Not sure."

Stormfly immediate began to wiggle, she was lanky dragon but even so, she could break free. But one of the men took care of that immediately, spitting a numbing dart right into her side. The mood dragon let out a hiss and Astrid could feel Stormfly's muscles loosening as she slackened.

"This is a restricted flight area," the man told them, "either of you have a permit to be flying around here?"

"No exactly." Asha said, keeping her head turned away from them. As far as Astrid knew, Stormfly wasn't even registered.

"Well then, how do we know you're not heading to attack our master's slavery?" Another man asked. "Like your two friends last night."

"What frieâ€?" Astrid asked, only to have it dawn on her that Hiccup and Camicazi mostly did get into trouble while looking for food to steal. "Oh greatâ€!" she muttered.

One of the men walked up to them, Astrid only seeing his dirt covered boots before he reached down and kicked at the passed-out Stormfly, turning them all over. Asha's hood fell down a little and she gasped, trying to turn her face away, but the man simply smiled.

"Oh ho ho." He laughed. "Asha is it? Or are you using another new name these days?"

Asha kept quiet.

"It's alright, you can play the silent routine, it not like you're not wanting at every Sanctuary station from here to the Holy Empire." He got down on his knees, getting right to Asha's face. "You've been hiding for too long."

Asha seemed distressed, though not out of nervousness, Astrid could tell, it was more of worry. Her eyes kept darting back to the direction they had come from. They hadn't flown too far from the camp, and even though it was faint, the barest indication of their fire pit was seen smoking in the distance.

The man followed her frantic gaze.

"Got some more hideaways back there?" the man asked a little too casually as he perked her chin up. Asha simply bit his thumb but only seemed to make him more interested. "Lads!" he called out. "Keep north, there's probably a whole lot of fugitives down there."

"No!" Asha called out, beginning to struggle in the bola ropes, but her stature was too lanky to break free, and her arms too restricted to reach for any weapon she packed. "Look, I'm the prize here, okay? Don't bother anyone else."

The man looked down at both of them before he reached and tugged at Astrid's chin as well. Her neck was still sore from the landing but she kept her glare icy when she felt his grimy fingers touch her skin.

"Just take me and don't hurt anyone else." Asha pleaded. "I'll go back to Rome, if that's what you want."

The man was silent for a good, long while. Staring them both down while he thought. Asha kept her composure though, and Astrid figured it wasn't the first time she had been through a capturing.

"Take them lads." The man finally said, and the other men hoisted Stormfly up, dragging her long body alongside Asha and Astrid onto the back of the biggest Monsterous Nightmare they rode. Astrid was in no way comfortable with how they were positioned, but in the fumble, tiny Nimfir was able to get untangled.

"Nimfir, go find the others." Astrid whispered before they were about to take flight, but the changewing just gave her doe eyes. "Nimfir," she just hissed. "Listen to me and go find the others, okay?" you'll be able to save me that way." Nimfir took another few moments to think but as they took off his grip slipped and he was left on the ground, letting out a small wince as Astrid saw him get smaller and smaller in the grass.

"Do you think he'll be able to do anything?" Asha asked.

"Nimfir will do anything for me." I know that much." Astrid smiled in spite of the situation, but she kept scanning the ground, wondering if they'd run into Camicazi and Hiccup on their way back or if they had been captured as well.

"Hiccup!" She let out a quiet breath, and continued to jostle in the bola ropes.

0o0

When the sun rose, Hiccup was woken up by a slap at the back of the head from Camicazi and stiff left leg that he had to get them home with.

They had already been flying the two hours it took them to get there but they were only halfway back. Hiccup had to frequently stop, taking a breather from having his foot locked in the stirrup for anything longer than 30 minutes.

"At this rate we won't get back until tonight." Camicazi muttered, but, for once, she didn't sound annoyed, worried was more like

it.

Though Toothless's ears shot up and he looked down suddenly.

_:::What? Are they after us?::: _Hiccup asked.

_:::No it's not the humans.::: _Toothless said. _:::It's the little one.:::_

Hiccup squinted, looking down at the ground as best he could but he couldn't see anything. Toothless opened up their link though, amplifying what he heard to Hiccup and they immediately began to land.

Hiccup knew that little whining anywhere.

"Wait, why are we landing again? We just took a breather 20 minutes ago!" Camicazi asked but Hiccup jumped off of Toothless running over to Nimfir shifting through the grass, whining to anyone or anything that would hear him.

"Nimfir what are you doing out here?" Hiccup picked up the little changewing. He was scared and shaking from exhaustion. Nimfir still had yet to learn how to fly, so any long walks for him were tiresome. "Where's Alastair?" Hiccup's brained kicked in, if Nimfir was wandering around far away from camp _without _Alastair_

"Where's Alastair, Nimfir?" Hiccup brought the changewing closer to him, wishing desperately that he could understand his whining. Nimfir squirmed, looking distressed. "Oh no!" Hiccup felt his stomach sink.

_:::The men looking for us, they must've passed us and found the camp.::: _Hiccup told Toothless. _:::And they got Alastair!::: _Hiccup buried his head into his hands, groaning.

"Don't just sit there crying, we've gotta head back to camp and see what the damage is." Camicazi said.

"But what if they're heading the opposite way."

"We don't know which way they're headed, but if anyone's back at camp I'm sure they'll know." She tugged his arm up, shoving him over to Toothless. "So _let's go_."

"If I hadn't gotten us caught those guys wouldn't have been after us and they probably wouldn't have found the camp!" Hiccup sighed as they flew, his leg was getting stiff again but he pushed through. He half expected Camicazi to disagree with him, or perhaps agree, but just say _something. _Instead, though, she said nothing, and that unsettled him more. "I'm a screw up aren't I?" He asked instead of waiting.

"Yep." She agreed simply. "That's what you wanna hear, isn't it?"

"Of course not."

"Sound like it to me. No one whines unless they want attention. You

either wanna be the man or the baby that every comforts."

"Hey you don't know anything about me!" Hiccup yelled. "I'm just worried about Alastair I..." His breathing got heavy as he yelled but when he let his breath trail, it just came out shaky. "Alastair's always protecting me, always, I justâ€œ|I want to be strong too."

"And you will be." Camicazi said, more gently than he expect. She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder before squeezing it roughly. "You just have to shut up and pay attention every once in a while."

Hiccup nodded, one firm and submissive nod.

"Tell you what. I'll do the saving this time, and you watch. You may learn something." Camicazi smiled, her tone had a twinge of teasing in it, so Hiccup wasn't sure if she was being serious or not, but either way he swallowed back every wry comeback he had for that comment and kept his mind focused on the task at hand.

Ooooh something super interesting and long-awaited comes in next chapter!

Review Responses:

AliceCullen3 and FireDemon92: Thank you!

Piplilpop: Yep, I'm in art college but it generally goes the same as most U.S public schools go. And those are good questionsâ€œ|too bad I can't answer any of them XD No spoilers!

Q-A the Authoress: Yeah, but being a tease isn't always bad, especially when it comes to writing XD

**Wolffury: Haha, That could've worked, but Gustav will show up much later in the story. And I'm pretty sure everyone can make a good guess of who the "her" is. **

TheShadowWarrior: Hey there! Looks like you got a lot of reviewing done, I'm glad you're liking the story. To comment on one of your comments, I'm not sure if this ending will match up with the books or the movies or neither since none of which have ended yet (we only know that dragons aren't there anymoreâ€œ|?) But this story draws a little from both franchises so it'll most likely have a different ending.

Guitar Amateur: Well, Astrid's role in the story is definitely super important but how soâ€œ|? You'll just have to wait and see. And I love how you called Camicazi "the spirited murderer" haha!

Kitty.0: Yeah, I can definitely say that Hiccup's mother is not the dragon heart. I'm gonna laugh so hard when it's finally revealed and I see everyone's reaction. And Astrid hiding her gender is kind of a back-issue in this story line, though she's more on the "I don't care what people think I am" at this point. She's just more comfortable and happier dressing as a boy.

**Nicky: Thank you, I hope you're enjoying the rest of the

story!**

Lord Anubis Judge of the dead: Those are both good bets! Keep looking for those clues. And I love your user name by the way!

Hey thanks for getting this story past 300 reviews! Next chapter should be here next Saturday!

Next Chapter: Alike and Agile, Part 3

22. Alike and Agile, Part 3

It's back with a punch!

Part Two: We Are Searching for Significance

Chapter Twenty-Two: Alike and Agile, Part 3

They were to be taken on carriage to the shipment port, and their next stop: the Holy Empire.

Apparently Asha was a high waging fugitive. Captured and escaped more times than any one person could count, something Astrid wouldn't have believed if she didn't already know that Asha didn't age.

Luckily, the book was back at camp, but even without it, Asha, herself, was fair game for a good fee if delivered promptly to Emperor Dagur.

"I'm sorry about mixing you up in all of this." Asha sighed as they landed at the estate. A prisoner's lineup seemed to be at the inner corridors.

"I've got two more for you, one's a high waging one." One of men pushed Astrid and Asha forward, six other fugitives in the lineup. Astrid didn't take too good of a look at any of them, but they all raged in sizes.

"You all will be shipped from carriage to port to Empire." The main guard said, pacing the lineup. "Any attempts to escape will earn you ten lashings." He cracked his whip for emphasis. "And for those of you who have been housed here for a while, you know that I'm not kidding when I say that." Astrid swallowed as he continued. "You gender and age do not matter. So before you think I won't reprimand a woman or child remember than you gave up those rights when you decided to go against the rules of the Empire. You are all criminals and thus will be treated as such."

"How progressive." Asha muttered under her breath, but Astrid didn't dare to speak. Very rarely was she shaken up over threats like this but she had a bad feeling at the pit of her stomach. The thought of being locked up againâ€¦having to come to grips with death being a very real option. She didn't want to go back there.

"Let's move out!" The guard called and they were all chained and taken to the carriage. It was a small space for the eight of them in total that would be transferred.

Astrid kept her head down and her legs close. Asha to her right and a taller boy to her left. When the carriage moved her leg jostled a little and hit the leg of the boy to her left and it was only then when Astrid looked up.

"Sorry," she said quickly, only eyeing him for a second before gasping. Only a quick glance and she knew exactly who was under the hair cut and the dirt covered cheeks.

"N-no wayâ€|" The person next to her said.

"Ruffnut!?"

0o0

By the time Hiccup and Camicazi returned it was already close to noon. The camp fire was smoked down, and everyone sat around in a more-or-less standby mode. Four of their companions were missing, all they _could _do was wait.

"I'm worried though!" Butterball called out but everyone gave him the same look. The "we're worried too but we have to wait" look.

"No need to worry, kid, we're here." Camicazi jumped off of Toothless as soon as they landed. Hiccup winced a bit as he dismounted, his leg stinging from the stab he'd gotten, but even so he certainly didn't miss the glance Cami gave him to push through the pain. Hiccup did just so, straightening up as he walked behind her to the middle of the group. Submission was hardly his favorite thing, but Hiccup was going to keep to his place this time around, especially since Alastair's well-being was on the line.

_::I don't understand why you have to push yourself beyond an injury:: _Toothless sighed, acting as if he had never done the same. But Hiccup had no want to backlash, he could sense the worry blocking out Toothless realizing the hypocritical flavor to his comment.

_::I have to learn how to be a better asset to this team eventually:: _ Hiccup told him. _::I can't rely on "I can talk to dragons" for everything:: _ As Hiccup spoke he cradled Nimfir closer, the little dragon still shaken up and just wanting a warm body beside him. Hiccup knew that he'd have to take Nimfir with him while he and Camicazi went to rescue Alastair and Asha, for the little dragon's claws hadn't released their bite on Hiccup's tunic since they found him.

::We'll find your mama soon,:: Hiccup reassured the changewing, even though he couldn't understand him.

Of the camp members, Butterball was the first to ran up and hug Camicazi as soon as she was close enough.

"I was worried when Papa said that you and Albar were lost and that Mama and Alastair went to find you." Butterball squeezed her tightly, Fishlegs not too far behind in joining the embrace.

"Alright, alright, off, off!" Cami yelped, but smiled all the way through her shoves. Her grin faded by the time she began speaking again, though. "We ran into some trouble."

"I can tell, you don't have any food." Gobber joked, but Cami's serious expression wiped the taste of another quip from his mouth. He cleared his throat. "I'm guessing something worse than not getting food happened?"

"I'm afraid so!"

"That explains why Alastair and Asha aren't back, they went looking for you two." Gobber sighed.

"We know, but they're captured." Camicazi exhaled, a heavy heave in her chest as the weight of the situation settled on her. Hiccup's lip trembled at the conversation but he stifled his words, letting his teeth sink into his lower lip in control of his want to try and defend how it wasn't his fault. A natural instinct for him, he sadly admitted to himself.

"See, I told you guys we should've just stopped in Nottingham, then none of this would've happened." Lashmed said with a suck in her teeth. Everyone sent glares her way but she shook it off and wiggled her shoulders a little bit.

"I'm sure it was the men who ran the farm we stole from," Cami continued.

"The farm and dragon slavery," Hiccup said, letting it slip out even though he told himself to stay quiet. Camicazi didn't seem to mind though.

"My only problem is that I'm sure everyone along these flats has some kind of connection to Sanctuary, or least knows the list of top fugitives for them."

"And Asha's definitely a face to look out for!" Gobber finished for her, pulling at the long braids of his mustache in thought. "You think she's on a prison line, yet?"

"I have no doubts, Alastair might not be worth too much around here but Asha and Stormfly are hefty sums."

"Okay, so who's leaving and who's staying?" Lashmed interjected. "Trying to track down a prison carriage means they're heading for a port, you're gonna need the stealthier ones of us."

Cami nodded. "Yeah, exactly what I was thinking." She surveyed the group quickly and Hiccup could practically see the gears turning in her brain, calculating, strategizing something brilliant to overcome the situation. He envied her for being to operate in such a way even while worried about her friends on their way to prison.

"Lashmed, I want you and Hookfang to come with me, Albar, and Toothless." Camicazi said a few moments later. "We'll track down the line and get Asha, Stormfly, and Alastair out. If we have to take down and free the entire line we'll do it, but our goal is only a three person rescue."

Lashmed and Hookfang both stood. "Right," they both said.

"Though I have a question," Lashmed said, cocking her hip as she pointed her finger Hiccup's way. His shoulder stood from the

attention being turned to him. "Why is he coming?" Her gaze flicked down his left leg as he gingerly applied little ground pressure on it. "He's hurt."

"Albar's going to learn from an old pro how to rescue people." She explained with a confident smile and a point at her chest. "He's coming even if he won't be of much use." Cami finished bluntly, her words sharp and hitting Hiccup square in his pride. Even more so because she was right.

Lashmed provided no more against the situation verbally, though she rolled her eyes and shook her head while she packed a small bag.

"Manga you and Gobber keep Butterball safe and keep heading for the ship, since we'll most likely be near a port by the time we get to rescue, we'll straddle the shoreline and meet you guys there when we're finished." Camicazi said. "Manga if you see anyone but us trying to approach you on the way there, don't take any chances, just shoot them down."

"Got it." Manga nodded, already going for her bow and arrow. Hiccup swallowed, the efficiency of the group making him feel even more out of place. He had learned of each of the bog's talents. Manga could shoot anything down with arrows as sharp as her eagle eyes. Though he was interested in seeing Lashmed's talent in action. She carried no weapons and looked generally dainty, though apparently she had the cleanest ability to steal anything and knock anyone out without making anymore sound than a pin dropping on a stone floor.

"Me and Albar we'll be in the skies, you two stay on ground." Cami said, even as she spoke she was mounting back on Toothless. "We've rescued Asha from a prison line before so Lashmed you draw them in, Hookfang take out the rest, and me and Albar will dive in once the picking is good. Normal bird calls apply if anything goes wrong. Let's move!"

"Right!" Lashmed and Hookfang called, sprinting up a few jumps before they both started to run across the flats, almost too quickly for Hiccup to really believe that they were human. It was the product of immense training and lot's of experience. Something Hiccup realized he had neither of.

"Rightâ€|" Hiccup said, robotically though not too far behind. He feared his uselessness more in the strategy more than the actual danger of the rescue itself. He hadn't really been given anything to do in the scheme of the rescue plan, the only thing he was really doing was flying Toothless, Camicazi behind him, eyes serious as she looked down to make sure Hookfang and Lashmed were still in reach. His leg still ached but he promised himself that the least he could do was push through the pain.

Alastair's life was on the line after all.

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"I can't believe it!" Astrid gasped, immediately grabbing Ruffnut's hands and practically beaming at her. She knew she was most likely getting looks from the other prisoners but hardly cared. "I-I thought you were dead or captured at best."

"She says as we're currently being pulled off in a prisoner's carriage." Ruffnut stifled a laugh just barely. "Still the same as always Astridâ€"or should I say, 'Alastair'. You still using that name?"

Astrid shushed her immediately looking around just to make sure the guard dozing off in the corner didn't hear that she had a different name.

"Oh right, sorry." Ruffnut gave a lopsided grin. "I'm glad you're okay. Well, as okay as you can be given that you're captured." Ruffnut leaned over looking at Asha. Both girls gave a simultaneous eyebrow raise.

"A pleasure to meet a friend of Alastair's." She bowed as well as she could without breaking her lazy lounge.

"Likewise." Ruffnut bowed as well, simply mirroring the gesture. "Geez, so proper." Ruffnut muttered to Astrid. "You ended up babysitting a rich royal or something?"

"Actually yes, just not her." Astrid laughed a bit, feeling the first real relief she's felt in ages it seemed. Regaling past events and laughing like they did time and time again on Merkskof. Though she kept sure to keep her voice down near Asha. "I ended up having to do my royals guard training by keeping the Prince safe." She whispered.

"Prince Hiccup!?" Ruffnut raised her voice, immediately slinking down. "You're yanking my chain right?"

"I kid you not."

"Wow, that must've been brutal."

"Oh it was, we ended up getting exiled and now we're on the run. So I never reallyâ€|finished my training."

"Pity, but same here."

Astrid's eyes widened but before she could ask anything, Ruffnut continued.

"I guess neither of us really got to where we said we would, huh?" she said.

Astrid's mood and face suddenly fell, looking around and noticing that Ruffnut was alone. She had left Merkskof wholly to find her brother, but he still wasn't with her.

"I'm going to him." Ruffnut smiled, the dirt caked in her cheeks wrinkling with her grin. "I know Tuff's probably held up in the capitol of the Holy Empire, and if that's where he's at, thenâ€|"

"You got yourself captured?"

"More like got us all captured." A boy sitting next to Ruffnut chimed in.

"Comments from the peanut gallery aren't needed." Ruffnut ruffled his hair before teasingly pushing his head back against the wall.

"You're not going to introduce us to your friend?" Another boy, though older, asked.

Ruffnut let out a sigh. "Astrid, this is Thuggory and Furfoot, a bunch of weirdos who travel with me."

"A bunch of weirdos who have stuck by your side and save your hide on a regular basis." Thuggory smirked when Ruffnut glared at him.

"Whatever, you two have been sulking the whole time and now you want to be introduced?"

"So you're Ruffnut's friend from Merkskof?" Furfoot leaned over, the chains of his cuffs tingling as he moved, his stomach hovering over Ruffnut's lap. "She mentioned you a lot."

"Is that so?" Astrid blushed a little.

"_Peanut gallery_." Ruffnut shoved Furfoot back to his place, meeting Astrid's gaze again. "And don't look so starry-eyed," she bit, and Astrid laughed a bit. "Of course I mentioned you, it's not every day you meet someone with enough guts to chop off their hair and ride into hell with you." Ruffnut leaned back on her folded arms, looking oddly comfortable for someone chained and on their way to the most notorious prison in the world. "So," she started. "How's your hell been?"

Astrid smiled, though she couldn't really understand why. Every product of her thoughts boiling from that question all conjured thought that made her frown, yet all that came forth was a smile. Was she amused? Or maybe now that she was thinking of all the things that happened to her in just a little under four months, she simply couldn't fathom how she turned out the way she did.

"I've lost everything." Astrid brought her knees up to her chest, smile still on her face though every other feature of her body looked miserable. She felt Asha's gaze on her, stern eyes but she didn't look away from her tattered clothes, sweaty from nerves, and dirty from walking along the flats. "Everything that made me who I was before I left is gone. My name, my goals, my family!"

She only hoped that Ruffnut already knew what happened on Merkskof, as she would hate to have to drop that bomb on someone. Ruffnut simply looked to the side and Furfoot's hand gently covered her's. She knew, Astrid concluded.

"What did the new you gain, though?" Asha suddenly asked, her expression the same, intense, watching. Astrid shook a little at the thought that Asha had heard everything. Then she'd know just how much of lie her and Hiccup were living. But then, Asha didn't seem like the blabbing type either way.

"It's weird but I'm not sure." Astrid answered. "I know I have something new, but it's too freshâ€|I can't label it yet." She wanted

to say that she gained a new family. That Hiccup and Toothless and Nimfir were her new family, that the bogs were her new friends, under any other circumstances she probably would've said just that, but something about being on her way to another prison left everything looking grey and unchangeable.

Astrid remembered this cold feeling. A lifeless doll within her covering her skin and taking over the warmth within her that wanted to radiate and hold on to all the new good things she had been bestowed, but the shell of her fears kept closing in. Her smile stayed oddly frozen on her miserable body, her hands clenched her knees, and her confusion lingered.

"Well, running the world with a banished prince sounds pretty exciting to say the least." Ruffnut jabbed her side playfully with her elbow, trying to cheer her up.

"He's an interesting character, I misjudged him all these years." Astrid looked up and her smile finally went from confusingly plastered to genuinely amused.

"As for me! whew, where do I even start?"

"When I left the ship for Berk would be a good start." Astrid offered.

"I guess, but things didn't start getting interesting until I was captured the first time after a failed spy mission in Denmark!"

0o0

:::You know when you're in such pain and you're this close to me, it gives me a headache.::: _Toothless groaned a bit, trying to sound annoyed but Hiccup knew the motivation behind his words was worry over anything else.

:::It's more than leg pain::: _Hiccup sighed.

:::I know, I know that better than anyone.:::

Hiccup smiled a little, petting the side of Toothless's forehead as they flew. Camicazi was so focused she didn't seem to notice what he was doing, so he let his back relax just a little, the tense strain in his shoulders still stinging while he felt the need to be alert and erect under Cami's stern gaze and tutelage.

:::We're both worried about her.::: _Toothless said :::But you can't let worry completely dominate every thought that you have.:::

:::Worry doesn't dominate everything though,::: _Hiccup laughed a little pathetically. :::I still leave room for guilt and self loathing.:::

:::I'm being serious, so should you.:::

:::Toothless you and I both know my problems, it's just who I am. I'm not proud of it but I doubt a major personality change is going to happen during this mission. I just have to watch Camicazi and

hopefully by the time we get to Yggdrasil I'll be a little more useful.::_

::You sound pathetic, I'm embarrassed to be friends with you.::

Hiccup gawped at that, for more reasons than one. He wasn't sure if he was angry at Toothless's wry commentâ€"that he most like didn't meet whole-heartedly, but stillâ€"or if he was flattered by one of the rare moments Toothless referred to him in the very poignant, very _human _term of 'friend'.

His face flushed in anger and happiness all the same, pouting much beyond his own will.

::What would suggest I do then, oh wise night fury?:::

::Maybe what you always remind me, that my past doesn't dictate my future.::

_::I said that?::: _Hiccup raised a brow, feeling that the word choice was too profound for someone like him.

::Well maybe not that wording exactly, but the thought pattern.::

_::Ohâ€|wellâ€|::: _Hiccup left the banter for later, and really took a moment to mull over the words. He was an ex-prince, generally no fighting skills, with an incredible and even _world-changing _talent that even he didn't understand and an even more incredible and world-changing mission to find a dragon heart who was surely to be ten-time more powerful than him. Hiccup was the perfect package for a _disaster_. Either too ordinary that even the extraordinary parts of him couldn't change that, or too outer worldly for anything in this world to trust him. But all of that shouldn't define himâ€|?

::So many thoughts at onceâ€|::: Toothless said.

::I just, I hear what you're saying, I really do. I know what I want to be, what I want to doâ€|it just seems like I always come up short when I try to do it. I have all this mysterious power surrounding me but I'm still so weakâ€|I'm always putting you and Alastair in danger because you both have to protect me. I'm the one with the powers and the destiny, I should be protecting you guys.::

_::Quite a mouthful there, do you feel any better?::: _Toothless asked.

::Not reallyâ€|:::

::You will, I have confidence in you. Your strength is undeniable, even if you can't feel it yet.::

Hiccup almost smiled, his grin would've widened if he hadn't been for the twinge of sadness he got from Toothless's words. And maybe sadness wasn't even the right word it, more likeâ€|fear. It made Hiccup shiver a bit, how many times he had felt that sensation lately. That fear and worry that Toothless kept emitting at certain thoughts about Hiccup.

He figured, now, that it was because of Toothless's fear that Hiccup was somehow going to kill him. No matter how many times He reassured him, that sensation stayed. He wished he had more of the story as to why Hiccup as supposed to kill him, but within due time Toothless would tell him. He had confidence in that no matter how long the wait was, he would know eventually.

A sudden chirp entered his ears, rather loud and foreign to any of the animals around the flats. It must've been the bog's signal. Hiccup looked over his shoulder at Camicazi but she was focused intently on the ground below her, so his eyes followed.

"Is something?" Hiccup began to ask.

"Look alive, looks like we caught them early." Cami said, even as she spoke she was readying her sword, looking as if she'd jump right off of Toothless.

"H-hey, you're not gonna!"? He was silenced again, a sweaty hand covering his mouth, salt blocking the words he would've spoke.

"Quiet Albar, this is the part where you watch closely." She turned, her gaze nothing but serious. "We're saving our friends, remember?"

"R-right." Hiccup immediately straightened up, his hands on the saddle gripping tightly. His leg throbbing but his will pushing through it. He just had to get Toothless to where Camicazi needed to be and watch closely. He could do that much.

The prison carriage was much bigger than the ones Hiccup had seen in places like Humber or Durham, though far less flashy.

"They've probably got a good ten or more stuffed in there." Cami muttered, and Hiccup wasn't sure if that was information he was supposed to know or if she was just talking to herself. He listened nonetheless with a firm nod.

He looked down, seeing that Lashmed and Hookfang had caught up to the carriage. He couldn't completely make out what they were doing, but Lashmed went ahead, jumping onto and then into the carriage while running with just graceful skill he wouldn't be surprised if she barely made a sound. A few minutes past before the carriage came to a halt and Hookfang jumped onto the stopped carriage, swords out, though not before Hiccup heard another foreign chirp.

"That's our cue, bring us down." Camicazi tugged at his tunic and Hiccup and Toothless banked left, descending as quickly as possible.

Cami was off before Toothless's hindlegs touched the ground, sword out and motioning Hiccup to stay close behind.

What should I do?:: Hiccup heard Toothless ask as he rain forward but the nightfury stayed behind.

Stay there for now, if there's trouble I'll call.:: Hiccup told him. Not sure if that was the plan, but then again, he barely knew what the plan was. But if Cami wanted Toothless to come she would've

said something.

By the time they got the carriage, Hookfang had already opened the back door and ripped out the guards that were with the prisoners. Just like in Lizbeth's manor Hookfang didn't take long to take out whoever was in her way. She slashed necks without a moment's hesitation, not being taken back by the blood the dripped down her sword and onto her fingers as she kept taking lives, carelessly almost.

It made Hiccup's stomach turn, but Cami ran right for it, and almost instinctively like she knew what Hiccup was thinking she took his hand and dragged him closer.

Hiccup turned his head a bit, though kept running forward, when he heard Toothless give a warning roar.

_::There's more of them!:: _Toothless called out.

"Cami!" Hiccup yelled as well, squeezing her hand. "Toothless says I-I mean, there's carriages behind us!"

"Yeah, they probably keep the parameters safe since they're carrying high risk criminals." She stopped on her heel, feet kicking up dirt.

"We're done here." Lashmed said, coming out of the front cab of the carriage and flipped her hair. She had no scratches on her whatsoever, only a few wrinkles in her clothes. Hookfang's swords and hands were soaked in blood but otherwise she was unharmed. And all that was left was a cab full of wide-eyed prisoners.

"Lashmed get the prisoners safe." Cami called, even as she spoke the two other carriages were practically spitting out guards all armed with swords and crossbows. A few arrows landed dangerously close to Hiccup's feet and he slinked back only to feel so cowardly that that was his first reaction.

"Look alive and watch closely." Cami said, a smirk on her face as she readied her sword, Hookfang not too far behind. The younger girl wiped her nose, the blood on her hands getting right above her lip. She smiled, almost enjoying it.

"B-but what about?" Hiccup looked back, scanning the prisoners Lashmed was helping for Alastair and Asha. He didn't see them yet!

"Later, get out your weapons just in case, but stay behind me at all times!" Cami ordered before she made contact with her first guard. Hook and Camicazi both seemed extremely adamant on making sure they were the front lines. No one got past them, so all Hiccup could do was watch. He looked a little more ahead, suddenly realizing he hadn't heard back from Toothless.

::Are you okay?:: He scanned the flats, landing on the night fury engaged in a battles with five guards from the right carriage. He bit his lip, his instinct moving his foot to run over to help Toothless despite knowing he would probably do nothing to make things worse.

Cami told him to stay behind her butâ€¦

He stepped forward, eyes solely locked on Toothless, his vision only adjusting to the figure to his right when an arrow was directly near him. He tried to duck in time but it was Cami that came to his rescue and took the arrow for him.

"Camicazi!" Hiccup gasped. Looking around in a fidget. Everything was happening too quickly, he couldn't keep up. Cami was only down a for a few moments before she sprang back up, looking over her shoulder for a fraction of a second to give Hiccup a thorough glare before she got back to fighting with an arrow lodged in her left arm. Still more skilled than he would've been under the circumstances.

He looked back at Toothless who had taken care of the men that were at him and was running back to Hiccup.

All of that for nothingâ€¦because _Toothless _was capable of defending himself, Hiccup realized.

It took all of ten minutes tops for Hookfang, Camicazi, and Toothless to take care of the guards. All three carriages stopped and dead bodies littering the flats.

Hiccup sank to the ground, his leg stinging but he hardly cared. Toothless was immediately by his side, stepping over him, his belly acting almost as a shield. Hiccup slinked under Toothless's shadow and threw up on the grass as quietly as he could.

"Go help Lashmed." Hiccup heard Camicazi's voice, and he slinked back even more. He was s_cared _even more so of _Camicazi _than he was of dying or of being useless. Camicazi scared him. Her strength, her leadership, how her everything was everything he wanted to be but couldn't to save his life. And it was scary to face someone he admired so heavily after having just been saved and hurling like a child at the aftermath.

"Get up." She said firmly. Toothless growled, stepping a little more over Hiccup protectively.

_:::You've done enough to him today.::: _Hiccup heard Toothless say, though not to him, but to Camicazi. She couldn't understand him, of course.

:::I-it's alright, Toothlessâ€¦ I'llâ€¦:

"You're not helping him by being that way." Camicazi stepped forward as well, not backing down from Toothless's growl. "I know you want to protect him, but Albar needs to learn to stand on his own too."

Hiccup got up at that, his knees shaky, his leg still throbbing but he stood, still trying to at least look strong even as he whipped a bit of dried throw up from the side of his mouth.

"What did you learn today?"

"Theâ€¦uhâ€¦.importance ofâ€¦umâ€¦"

"Yeah? Yeah?" Cami egged him on, though sounded impatient.

"Of sticking to the plan even if I think I know better."

"And?"

"Andâ€¢?" Hiccup shrugged at that one, honestly thinking he had gotten everything.

"And," Camicazi said, placing a hand on the arrow still jutted into her arm. Her fingers wrapped around it, looking like she was going to pull it out but stopped herself. "To rely on and trust other's abilities." She drew her sword and pointed to Toothless. "You went after him thinking he couldn't handle himself and almost got yourself killed, and while you were doing that you didn't watch your surroundings to make sure that leaving your post was a safe choice. Petty mistakes that would've left your for dead if it wasn't for me." Her fingers went to the arrow in her skin again. "And now I'm injured."

"I," Hiccup reached up towards her but immediately placed his hands back down. "I'm sorry."

"I know you are." Cami said, her voice suddenly softer. "That's why I want to help."

She began to walk away but before turning her back completely she said one last thing.

"So, starting when we get back to the ship." She smirked. The kind of smirk Camicazi made when she knew she was getting her way no matter what. "I'm teaching you how to use a sword properly."

Hiccup's lips tugged up into a smile, but his body still shook. He was happy and scared all at the same time but neither masked his excitement.

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Once the chaos had lifted some of the prisoners jumped out and immediately started running across the flats. Others simply took in what had just happened. Hookfang was helpful in getting those who hadn't simply run off to get their chains off of them while Lashmed removed the arrow from Camicazi's arm. And Hiccup scanned the small crowd of prisoners one by one for a certain person.

Though a little changewing that had been sleeping in his tunic immediately jumped out before he could even make eye contact.

"Alastairâ€¢." Hiccup said, the word and breath that left him was nothing but relief. Nimfir leaped into Alastair's arms as soon as Hookfang got the chains off of her wrists and legs and soon enough she was smiling at him.

"Hey," Alastair said, her words almost sounding casual if he hadn't been for the smile on her face. It seemed like she was trying to hold back, her fingers kept twitching forward towards him but Alastair kept herself at bay.

"Hey yourself." Hiccup grinned. He wanted to ask if she was okay, if she was in her right mind after almost being imprisoned again. All Hiccup got was glimpses of how broken she looked when she was locked up back on Berk but, looking at her now, Alastair seemed fine—a bit dirty and breathing heavy, but fine nonetheless. "You've really had some adventure today, huh?" He decided on, keeping up the casual nature for her sake.

"Nah, this was light work compared to some of the stuff you've put me through."

"Uhh..yeah..about that!" He started. He had this long speech he wanted to make about how he's sorry he was useless and how he's going to try better to be a protector in their family, but all he got was a bunch of mush bubbling from his tongue.

Alastair held up a hand to silence him anyways.

"We can talk about that later. Besides, there's someone I want you to meet."

"Eh? Who?"

A boy walked forward and Alastair smiled at them as well, the knowing kind of smile that was exchanged between friends, or at least people that you knew well. He raised a brow.

"Hiccup, remember I mentioned how when I left Merkskof that there was another girl who went with me?"

"Oh!?" Hiccup immediately straightened up. It wasn't a boy it was _a girl_. "Ruffnut, right?"

"Aww, you have mentioned me." Ruffnut pinched at Alastair's cheeks. "You flatter me, Asta!"

Ruffnut didn't get to finish her sentence when Alastair choked her, playfully but still enough that she couldn't finish what she was going to say. Hiccup raised a brow yet again.

"I told you not to tell him." Alastair kept her hold.

"S-sorry! j-just lemme go!" Ruffnut gasped.

Hiccup kept his mouth shut but didn't take long for him to get that Alastair was still—and he sighed at the thought—keeping a secret from him. Her real name. Always a mystery. He had half a mind to just ask Ruffnut now that she was there, but he also respected Alastair too much to do that.

"Albar!" Hiccup heard Cami call him and he perked up, almost feeling like a dog to a master.

"Y-yes?"

"We're heading west." She said.

"But the ship's east, isn't it?" Hiccup tried to remember the map but he was certain that the shore was eastward.

"It is but we're not going back to the ship just yet." Asha walked up, placing a hand on Hiccup's shoulder as she spoke. "Unfortunately Alastair and I were taken in the carriage but Stormfly was left back at the dragon slavery."

"It'll be safer if we all go there together." Cami smiled. "Besides it'll give you a chance to observe me more."

"Should I take notes?" Hiccup took a jab at some lighthearted banter.

"That would be to your benefit. Assuming a snotty Viking like you can write."

"Pfft, I was writing documents since I was two and you were stillâ€" He began to quip but Alastair tugged at his neck sash, brining him close.

"Excuse me but since when does Camicazi know you're a Viking?"

"Umâ€|a lot's happened. I'll have to get you up to speed."

"Yeah," Alastair said, it was a dry response and Hiccup couldn't peg an emotion to it, but his brain was too worn out to think about it at the moment.

"Cami," Lashmed said. "What are we gonna do with the other prisoners?"

"Their choice." Camicazi shrugged. "They can stay with us or leave, but if they're staying they better be able to earn their keep."

Ruffnut raised a hand. "I've got some business to take care of back at the dragon slavery, so I'll be tagging along."

"I guess that means us too." Thuggory sighed, Furfoot not short behind.

"Well we're leaving in an hour so anyone heading west get your gear together." Cami looked around at the carriages, the main one wasn't too wrecked. "We can use this, it'll be faster than some of us using Toothless and the rest walking. Just make sure you get all of the bodies out."

"And what are you gonna do with them?" Hiccup asked, almost desperately.

Camicazi held her left arm, a blood stained cloth wrapped tightly over it. "Give them a proper burial, of course. Why do you think I said we'll leave in an hour?"

Wow okay, sorry but I really have no clue when the next chapter is gonna be up so hopefully you enjoyed this one. But hey, Ruffnut's back! We'll learn her full story as to what she's been up to very soon, and the new characters just keep piling up!

No review responses cause it's been quite a while _

Until we next meet!

23. Alike and Agile, Part 4

Alright we're getting a little bit closer to the end of part 2. There's about 4-5 more chapters in this part (depending on how things turn out as I have 2 chapters that might be short enough to combine into one long chapter but then I have another really long chapter than I might have to split in two).

Either way, there's a lot of different character connections starting now between pretty much everyone so if you like character dynamics then you're probably going to love the rest of part 2.

Part Two: We are Searching for Significance

Chapter Twenty-Three: Alike and Agile, Part 4

"Albar, I'm pretty sure your dragon is broken." Cami said dryly as they all did their best to dig a big enough burial hole despite their lack of shovels.

"What makes you think Toothless is broken?" Hiccup teased at asking, even though he knew what her answer would be.

"Oh, I don't know, maybe because he maimed a whole bunch of enemy soldiers instead of killing them." She shoved some dirt in his face as she jabbed her fingers into the ground.

"Toothless prefers not to kill people anymore." Hiccup said, shrugging. The night fury had made that very clear between the final events they had on Berk and the incident with Lizbeth. He didn't exactly understand the rationale since Toothless could flatten pretty much any obstacle whenever he wanted, but he simply figured that the heavy burden that came alongside constant killing most likely outweighed the convenience of power. Hiccup's chest swelled a little at the thought, humbled and proud to have such a dragon walk beside him.

"So he leaves them almost dead instead?" Cami looked over that the guards that they were going to bury but instead were going to be forced to leave tied up in the flats. Some of them were badly bruised, others had major body parts cleanly bitten off. But none of them were dead. Some were probably in more than enough pain to wish they were dead, and Cami made it clear that she had no interest in tending to any of their wounds.

Camicazi turned to Toothless who was lazily lounging beside the digging group instead of helping. "You're worse than Albar. Either finish the job cleanly or don't start it."

"He doesn't understand you." Hiccup said, smiling a little.

"Yes he does, I can tell by the way his eyes moves when he hears humans speaking. He understands at least the general idea of what we're saying."

_:::Is that true?::: _Hiccup looked over at Toothless, trying to be discrete enough so that it didn't seem like he was communicating with the dragon. Though his question was a doubled whammy. If Toothless simply answered yes or no without further explanation than at least he would know that he did understand other humans since he knew what Hiccup was even asking about. On the other hand, if Toothless didn't than he'd know for sure that dragons really didn't understand human speech as much.

_:::It's not that simple.::: _Toothless shook his head a little, shaking off a few bugs from the grass that had made a home on Toothless's skin.

Hiccup's eyes clicked up. He had at least understood what Cami had said.

_:::Once I'm around anything long enough I can pick up on their speech patterns and what certain sounds mean. I can understand you perfectly but with other humans it's more observational than anything else. Also, if you haven't noticed, I can read your thoughts, and whether you realize it or not you react and think about what people say to you, that comes in handy a lot when trying to interpret what people around you are saying.::: _

That was a lengthier explanation than Hiccup every expected to get from the night fury and he stopped his digging, blinking multiple times, simply to show how utterly shocked he was.

_:::I, uh, I guess I never thought of it that way.::: _

_:::Well it would be the same if you were surrounded by lots of dragons and had to use me as a means to understand them.::: _

Hiccup shivered at the thought, though he wasn't sure if the wave that ran up his spine was excited or nervous at the thought of being surrounded by dragons he'd have to learn to communicate with.

He'd kind of hoped for the conversation to keep going but Toothless seemed uninterested again and laid his head back down to rest some more.

"You should teach your dragon not to be so noble. Especially not in this kill or be killed atmosphere around the Saxons." Cami said suddenly, still digging and not looking up.

Hiccup chewed on his lip, wondering if the gnawing was angry or nervous. Nobility wasn't something he had to teach Toothless, and it wasn't something he was actively going to tell him to leave behind. His hands balled in the dirt. His gnawing turning angry for sure.

"Yeah well what do you knâ€"!" Hiccup began to yell but Cami silenced him with her own words. Her oddly calm yet firm words.

"I know more than you." She said before looking over at Hiccup, her eyes glazed over and hollowed. "How stained are your hands with the blood of others?"

Hiccup gulped. The question alone enough to make him falter but coupled with the look in Camicazi's eyes his digging stopped

completely. Though not for the scared reasons he had originally thought, no, this was because he could actually answer the question in a way he never thought he would.

"I've killed people beforeâ€|" He said, wondering why the words came out proud when just saying them made his stomach churn. He looked up for Camicazi's reaction, hoping to catch her off guard just once, but she just had her eyes closed.

"And yet you still smell of your mother's milk." She sighed. "You're so young, don't sound proud of killing people. It's not like we're competing in some blood hunt."

"I-I'm not." Hiccup stuttered. "I just thought you should at least know that I'm not as helpless as you think." The words tasted like a lie when they left his tongue and floating into the air. He smacked his lips, lapping up the bad taste.

"Why'd you do it?" Cami asked.

"They wereâ€|they were going to kill Alastair. So I killed two guards that were in my way."

"Two guards, huh?" Hiccup thought he almost saw a smile graze her lips, but it was a sad one at the most. "So you snuck into prison to get your brother?"

Hiccup gulped again, almostâ€"and not for the first time while talking to Camicaziâ€"his made-up back story. Alastair was his older brother, and he was most definitely not the Viking Prince. Camicazi already knew he was a Viking, so what was his new back story going to be? Alastair would probably smack him for not thinking that through when he admitted to Cami being correct of him being a Viking.

"Yeahâ€|" was all Hiccup offered. "I'd do anything for my brother, since he's done so much for me."

"That's very noble of you." Cami continued digging, and another smile flickered on her face, but this time it was most definitely a happier one. "Like rider, like dragon."

Hiccup smiled to himself before turning his head over to Camicazi who was invested in digging, moving quickly despite the arrow-shot injury to her arm, but she certainly didn't look like she was going to talk much anymore. He let out a sign and scanned the circle of diggers instead.

Asha was in her own thoughts as per the usual, though it didn't escape Hiccup's thoughts of how pale she consistently kept looking. He left himself a mental note to ask her if she was getting sick at a more convenient time. Hookfang and Lashmed were over the right preparing the bodies to be buried, though not before making sure they stripped the guards of anything valuable that wasn't too heavy to carry on their trip back to the dragon slavery.

All of the other prisoners had chosen to leave besides Alastair's friend Ruffnut and her two companions whose names escaped Hiccup. He had been briefly introduced to them but nothing beyond that. Plus it seemed as if Alastair was having a little fun talking with someone

from her home island. He smiled at the thought, liking to see her so normal, even if the situation wasn't normal at all as they were digging a grave for guards they had all killed.

If anything, Hiccup felt an odd contentment wash over him even in a lull between one rescue mission and another. Something about Camicazi offering to teach him how to be a better protector left him feeling hopeful, Alastair being safe made him feel secure, and he looked over the sleeping night fury beside him and smiled. Toothless being so friendly and familiar with him lately made him feel special.

Hiccup actually felt good for the first time in a while it seemed. Even if his leg still throbbed from his injury and they still had another mission where he would essentially be useless only reduced to watching Camicazi and following her lead which he promised himself he would actually do this time he felt good knowing he had things to look forward to.

Good things.

OoO

Astrid was actually glad for the time they spent digging, even if it was for a grave. The light breeze outside left a biting chill but even so having air running through her left her blood feel renewed. Much better than being drenched in her own nervous sweat on her way to a Roman prison.

That, and it was great to speak to Ruffnut again.

Her two traveling companions, however, were a different story.

"I'm tired of digging." Furfoot sighed, picking the dirt from under his fingernails with a pout. "I thought we had a plan that we were sticking to."

"We are this is just a little unexpected detour." Ruffnut rolled her eyes at the younger boy's childishness but looked affectionate nonetheless. Astrid blinked at the exchange, not remember Ruffnut ever giving such an affectionate look, especially after Tuffnut left to be a warrior.

"Ugh, I always feel like you and Thuggory are on top of things and you never tell me anything." Furfoot let out another sigh, flicking a large collection of dirt he picked from his nails into the distance.

"I'm just about as lost as you are, Furfoot." Thuggory shrugged. "But you know Ruffnut, always three steps ahead." He tossed dome dirt at her head playfully "Or at least she's good at faking like she's on top of things."

Ruffnut not-so-lightly punched his arm before tossing her dirt filled hair behind her ear.

"I'm glad to see that you've made some good companions." Astrid smiled, her thoughts more inwardly noted even though she spoke them aloud.

"You too." Ruffnut shared he grin, "though the Viking Prince and a night fury were the last people I would've guessed for you to team up with."

"I'm kind of relieved that you're not freaking out more about it." Astrid looked down a little, still letting out sighs of relief in how easily Ruffnut accepted her dragon association despite her entire reason for leaving Merkskof in the first place.

"After all I've been through around here, I can accept just about anything. Besides, you've got it worst than I do."

"Oh yeah, how do you figure?" Astrid asked, not really denying it, but curious to know Ruffnut's reasoning.

"You're taking sides."

Astrid didn't expect that to be her answer and she blinked a few times.

"I could care less about these Sanctuary people, Emperor Dagur's dream for a better future, Ragnarok, or whether or not dragons are free or slaves. I know it sound awful but I don't really care about any of that stuff." Ruffnut continued to explain. "I justâ€¦I just want my brother back. But youâ€"" she looked over at Astrid "â€"you gave up everything you left to do for this 'save the world' cause. I'm not sure if I admire you or think you're stupid."

They both laughed at that.

"I'd be fine if you thought I was stupid." Astrid scratched her cheeks, smudging dirt over pale cheeks, rosy from the cold. "Odin knows I've made some stupid calls so far."

"Like waiting so long to tell Prince Hiccup that you're a girlâ€¦and he still doesn't know your real name!" Ruffnut lightened the mood and threw some dirt in her face. "Get it together, Astrid!"

"Keep it down!" Astrid bit. "Keep everything down. No one here knows that Hiccup's a prince. As far as you're concerned I'm Alastair, he's Albar and we're brothers, got it?"

"Ugh, this is so complicated." Ruffnut scratched her head. "But I still can't see the harm in at least telling Princ-_Albar_ your name."

"It's really not that simple to explainâ€|" Astrid took her hands out of the dirt, fists balling on the knees of her pants, not minding the dirt stains.

"Try me, we've got time."

Astrid let out a sigh. "O-okay thenâ€¦have you ever felt like you were born in the wrong body?" Astrid knew she was treading in dangerous waters when she saw Ruffnut give her a peculiar look. The kind of look Ruffnut only gave once in a blue moon. A mix of concern, confusion, and slight fear. Almost close to the face she made when she hear Tuffnut was missing.

Still, she continued speaking. "Almost like who you are isn't who you

were meant to be."

"Iâ€|don't follow you." Ruffnut sighed.

"I knowâ€|I almost don't follow me either." Astrid laughed, a pitiful, confused laugh. She clutched at her chest, it was bound down as usual, she was almost used to it. Almost used to a lot of things that she never thought she would.

"Astridâ€|" Ruffnut said softly, and Astrid reacted slowly to her own name being called. If she had heard 'Alastair' her head would've popped up immediately. Never did Astrid think she'd be so unused to her own name. That her own name would _disgust _her so much. Astrid Hofferson, a sheltered, spineless girl living a wasted life. And for the few momentsâ€"the last momentsâ€"she was Astrid again was when she was in the middle of the burnt remains of her home, her neighbor telling her she was a horrible person for leaving.

Astrid Hofferson was a horrible person.

Alastair Ackerman was something different, though. _Someone _different. Being a boy, traveling with a banished prince, running from rules, from everyone and basically on a mission to save the world. Alastair was a phoenix that rose from Astrid's ashes and gave new life to a withered body.

She only wished Alastair was completely real, and not just a fake body and a fake person. No matter how much she called herself Alastair, bound her chest, made Hiccup call her his brother. She was still a girl, she was still Astrid. And it made her feel uncomfortable. Like Alastair was constantly scratching underneath her skin, begging to come out but her skin was too taught and wouldn't burst. The feeling was itchy, irritatingâ€|_uncomfortable. _

She didn't even realize she was crying when she felt Ruffnut's hand on her shoulder, and felt the gentle rivers of tears going down her cheeks.

"You know, you always used to tell Atlas that you wish you were a boy like him." Ruffnut said, a sentimental smile on her face, though sad nonetheless. "Andâ€""

"And he'd say that I didn't have to think like that because I could be like him and still be a girl. I knowâ€|" Astrid finished for her, sharing the same smile. "Thing is, I actually believed him back then." She sighed "But nowâ€|"

"You don't?" Ruffnut finished this time.

"Yeahâ€|" She held her arms up, they smelled of dirt and sweat, and wrapped them around herself, a miserable hug. "I don't want to be Astrid anymoreâ€|I don't want to be reminded of anything but the life I've had for the past few months. It's been hell but it's the only time I've ever felt truly alive."

There was silence after that, not from lack of concern one Ruffnut's part, Astrid knew that. She just didn't know what to say. So they both just sat in silence. Eyes darting, fingers fidgeting, and minds racing.

"Even after I found out about what happened to Merkskof," Ruffnut finally spoke. "I honestly can't say that I regret that life. I don't regret being me, my name, my gender, myself."

More silence, though it only lingered for a few moments before Astrid jerked up, feeling Ruffnut's hand run through her hair for a moment, little blonde tuffs curling around Ruffnut's fingers. Ever since Astrid had cut it much shorter than she had on Berk the feeling was a little freer.

"Your hair looks way nicer short than mine did." Ruffnut laughed. "I was glad when I could grow it out again," she shook her hair. It was shoulder length and still much shorter than Astrid knew Ruffnut was used to.

"I'm sure." Astrid laughed, it was a bit forced, but still felt reliving.

"So," Ruffnut sat back, giving up on the digging for the moment and putting her arms behind her head as she lay on the grass. "Do you really feel like a boy now?"

"I-Iâ€"" Astrid stuttered, blushing. "I mean, it's certainly more convenient to be one. There a few things that I could do without, like these stupid bindings, andâ€|" She looked up at Hiccup, her intense gaze making her think back to when she was in the prison on Berkâ€|when she kissed him and she sighed. "A few other thingsâ€|" she landed on. "But to be honest, I don't think I ever really felt like a girl to begin with, now I feel like I'm just allowed to be whoever I want."

"As long as you're happy, or at least as happy as you can get given the situation of you being banished with a prince and all." Ruffnut smiled and Astrid shared it.

"It's better than living the way I was." Astrid shrugged simply, deciding not to dwell on the casual nature of her own words.
"Besides, he's a large reason as to why I'm even as happy as I am now." At thatâ€"as if knowing he wasn't mentionedâ€"Nimfir crawled up Astrid's arm, perching himself on her shoulder and licking her cheek.
"You all are." Astrid corrected herself quickly though meaning it nonetheless.

She flicked her gaze over to Hiccup who was over near Camicazi, though he didn't look like he was all there. He was spacing out so much more lately and it was starting to worry Astrid. She regretted the short time they had been apart only because it seemed like she had missed something._ A lot _of somethings. A lot of _important_ somethings that she wasn't too sure she liked Camicazi knowing before her. Not really because of any conventional reason, and Thor forbid she was jealous, but it was something stranger, that she couldn't pinpoint, but it left the space between her and Hiccup starting to feel greater and greater, and just the feeling gave her skin chills.

She ran a dirty hand over her arm to quell her quaking and stood.

"I'll be back," She told Ruffnut.

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"Hey." Astrid greeted, raising a hand almost awkwardly when Hiccup peaked his gaze up, a quiet and content look catches her's from under his lashes.

"Hey," he immediately perked up, smiling widely. Toothless raised an ear to the perk, and gave a smile of his own noticing that Astrid had joined them.

"How are you doing?" Astrid reached over, just barely touching his leg but not yet brushing the skin.

"Eh, the scratches I got during the raid on Berk were worse." He winced a little, trying to laugh it off. "But it at least with those it didn't hurt to walk."

"Well we should put some ice on it when we can." She said.

"That's probably not going to happen. We're roughing it out here with the Bogs, I'm pretty sure ice isn't going to be as readily accessible as it was back on Berk or even on Johann's ship."

Astrid gave a nod, not even thinking of that. She wanted to slap herself for getting a little too comfortable with living easily. Just the few months she spent in the palace had softened her standards, and even though her, Hiccup, and Toothless were on their own for a little while the creature comforts of Johann's ship far outweighed the little time they spent running through the outskirts of the Archipelago.

"Still, we need to treat this somehow or elseâ€" "

"Alastair, I'm fine, really, no need to go all mommy-mode on me." He slapped his chest a little. "I'm a big boy."

Astrid almost laughed at the gesture, but not the statement itself. She could see it, Hiccup's growth. He was getting stronger, getting more attached to goals that were reachable. It had worried her when all he wanted was Berk's respect, and even more so when all he wanted was to 'save the world'. She'd rather him go after the more reachable goals first, and hopefully they'd all add up to achieving the bigger ones.

Still, it was a little sad, seeing him grow more and realizing that the more he figured out who he was, the less she knew anything about herself.

She took a moment while Hiccup was occupied to just look at him, his features the way his hands moves, his nose wrinkled cause he had a bit of a sniffle but refused to bring up his neck sash. His hair was getting a little longer, his skin rosier from being out in the crisp winter breeze with the Bogs for so long.

All at once, she realized again all the things she truly liked about him, but somehow it was different. So much more different than when she'd fumble and blush back at the palace, yet no word she knew in either of the two languages she now spoke could pinpoint it.

"Alastair." Hiccup's voice suddenly broke her thoughts and she perked up, realizing she had just been sitting there, her gaze down in the hole everyone was digging at that point.

"Hmm?" She hummed, as casually as she could muster.

"I'm sorry."

She wasn't exactly expecting an apology.

"What?"

"I said I'm sorry."

"No, I got that, I just don't get why you're apologizing."

"Because I feel like I haven't been living up to what I said."

Astrid blinked, almost about to say how she still wasn't following him when Hiccup continued to speak.

"I promised you back at Merkskof that I'd protect you, and I haven't been doing that." He looked at her, dead in the eye, that look that always made her gulp. "I swear, I'm going to do better," Hiccup said firmly. "I'm going to be taking lessons with Camicazi so I can get better at protecting all of you."

"Y-youâ€|" Astrid began, almost saying that Hiccup didn't need to do that. Almost wanting him to stay the way he was simply because it would mean that he needed her. But she swallowed back all of those things because of that gaze. It always made her swallow back anything she had in mind to say but, this time, it was alsoâ€|_different.

Before it was because she was subjected to such an intense gaze, but now, she felt like he wasn't really looking at her. It was almost like he was looking at something unreachable to her but all the more real to him, and it left her feeling distant and torn through.

"Alright" was all Astrid could say, a nod in her words as she began to turn away. "Butâ€""

"We're just about ready to bury these deadbeats." Astrid heard Camicazi speak loudly before she could finish the sentence, or even finish the thought pattern of where she wanted that sentence to go. But given the wash of relief that flooded over her when she realized the mission was going to start back up was enough to made her feel content with leaving the thought and, whatever words that would come after it, unsaid.

Lashmed and Hookfang dragged over some of the guards from the heap Cami had left them in, some of Toothless's non-kills looking up at Cami as she gave them a triumphant look that was not a smile but certainly not void of pride.

"As always, I will honor the fallen, even the fallen of the opposite side. Any death means a life was taken and must be rendered judgment past the branches of Midgard, I can't say that I feel sorry for you, though, I'm not decent enough to pity you." She stepped over to the guards. "I know Sanctuary's cause can be considered noble to some,

but to be honestâ€|I don't really care about any of that."

"Camiâ€|" Asha interjected, crossing her arms in almost a warning, but Camicazi didn't seemed phased, the whole burial speechâ€"if it wasâ€"seeming more like a vent than a real service. Astrid still gulped at the words, finding it almost scary how she had heard the same things from Ruffnut just a little while ago.

"I'm going to go to Yggdrasil and get back what was taken from me." Camicazi stepped and looked right into the eyes of a dying man, her expression almost undefined. "You can try and stop me but you can'tâ€|because I'm going to surviveâ€|"

"D-Dagur willâ€|" One of the guards tried to choke out, but Camicazi kicked him down, stepping on his neck and not even flinching when he let out moans of agony. Though no one moved, Astrid noticed, Asha closed her eyes in disappointment, Lashmed and Hookfang in submission, and Astrid knew it was not her place to interfere with these people but she wasn't too surprised when Hiccup hobbled up to her and kicked her leg off the man's throat, not even thinking as he used his bad leg and gave a loud hiss afterwards.

"I keep telling you to toughen up, Albar." Camicazi gave a hiss of her own.

"I know you're merciless but try to have a heart." Hiccup told Cami, softly, gently, looking amazed and scared of her all at the same time.

Camicazi laughed at that, and Astrid half expected the reply the bog gave.

"Can't have what I was never born with."

Hiccup could only blink at that, but that glimmer in his eyes still remained. Astrid knew that look all too well. Camicazi was too dazzling for Hiccup to comprehend. Too impressive, too scary, too ahead of his own reach. The fun and thrill that came in chasing after the unattainable, trying to match her power, her skill, her cunning. It was a goal for Hiccup and Astrid could smell the blood of his trail now.

Camicazi sparkled at a distance that Hiccup strove to reach towards, and yetâ€|Astrid felt left in the dark. Confused, bound down, and losing her inner light.

0o0

It was a little degrading for Hiccup, riding on Toothless with Camicazi while the others ran behind. The glided low to the ground, something Toothless didn't particularly enjoy because it took more strength to stay elevated but Cami demanded they stay low so she could readily make calls when she needed.

Hiccup would've argued that she could've just ran in front if that's how she felt but he knew she was recoveringâ€"whether she knew it or notâ€"from her injury. Hiccup almost laughed at the thought if he hadn't felt so put down that Camicazi didn't hesitate to tell him that he was going to fly because of his 'tender leg' (so she called it) but couldn't admit that she wanted to fly because her arm was

just as tender.

Nightfall was already cresting over the horizon and Hiccup looked behind him to see that everyone was keeping up a lot better than he thought despite the fact that they had been running for at least three hours. Even Alastair's friends were keeping up. He sighed, wondering and doubting that he would be able to keep up with them if he had been giving the option to run.

"Alright everyone." Cami turned her head, keeping a steady arm on Hiccup's shoulder as she half stood on Toothless's back while she spoke. "We're going to be coming back up on enemy controlled portions of the flats so look alive and keep in the taller areas of the grass. If we keep at this pace we should be getting to the slavery in at least another two to three hours."

Hiccup's eyes widened at that, and he looked behind him again, at Alastair in particular. She didn't look especially winded by running so much, and he wondered when exactly she had gained such stamina.

"Lashed you, Asha, and Alastair go in first and take out the major obstacles. Hookfang, you and I will go in and go wild to go get Stormfly."

"Ah yeah!" Hookfang grinned, swinging her sword even as she ran.

"Alastair your friends umâ€|"

"Ruffnut, Thuggory, and Furfoot." Ruffnut corrected her, her breath a little labored as she spoke.

"Right, right, you three, since I don't really know you or your abilities I'm going to put you on outside guard, make sure no one gets in or out. Can you do that?"

"Psh, don't insult us." Furfoot said, his childish voice and toothy grin not matching his snide comment.

"Fine, I'm putting a lot of trust in you guys, so I only pray you don't piss me off and disappoint me."

"Oh scary." Ruffnut muttered to herself.

"Um, Cami?" Hiccup said when he realized he had no place in the plan. He wasn't too surprised, as he assumed he'd just go with Camicazi, but he would at least like to be humored like Cami respected him and be included when she was giving out orders.

"Yeah what?" turned to him, not exactly sitting down just yet.

"What about me?"

"Ah, yeahâ€|almost forgot." Cami said, so nonchalantly that it made Hiccup grip his bottom lip hard with his teeth. "Um, you know what, you go with Asha's group."

"Really?" Hiccup frowned, wondering why he wasn't with Cami.

"Yeah, you said you wanted to protect your brother right? Well do just as you said. Think smart, stay alert, and make sure Alastair is safe. You are going to be the first ones going in after all." She gave him a grin, like it was all according to place and it made Hiccup swallow. He wasn't sure what would be easier. Being at a watchful eye of Camicazi's actions or actually being thrown in the lion's pit and expected to perform up to her standards.

Hiccup looked back at Alastair and sighed. He wanted to _had _to do better when he came to making sure she was safe. Lion's pit or not, he _had _to do this. And do it well.

He turned back around, gripping onto the reigns with new intent. Everything was rather silent for the remaining time, even as the sun disappeared and nightfall has fallen a norm to their eyes all Hiccup heard was a gentle wisp of the night chill, the light crack of everyone's quick but light footsteps, and Toothless's wings flapping everyone once in a while.

Even the dragon's thoughts we're, once again, closed off to him, and any attempt to get his attention was thwarted with him being ignored. Hiccup huffed, hating being left to his own silence as he knew he'd just go back to worrying about facing the dragon slavery again without Cami's guidance.

"Look alive!" Cami hissed from behind him, loud enough that only people close enough could hear. She hopped off of Toothless's saddle at that point, landing into a run as she held her injured arm close like it was no problem. "Dragon slavery is about 20 minutes ahead." She pointed with her sword as she ran and rolling atop the grassy horizon was, in fact, the slavery. "Asha you make the calls in your group, so you pick how you want to utilize the fact that Albar and Toothless are with you." She looked up at him. "Remember what I told you, okay?" She said, almost gently if Hiccup had to put on a word to the tone of her voice. He nodded firmly nonetheless.

"Ruffnut you be in charge of your group." Cami continued to order. "Asha your group should start running ahead, send back the usual call noise when everything clear for me and Hookfang."

"Right." Asha nodded. "Don't lose your head too much, though." Asha warned, though it was soured a bit but the chuckle deep in her words.

"As if I could control that" Camicazi shared her laugh before everyone began to widen out. Camicazi and Ruffnut's group fell back a bit, allowing the four in Asha's group to get the lead. Hiccup gulped and with shaky hands touched the side of Toothless's face, trying one last time to get his closed off attention.

This time he felt the dragon's awareness open up and all at once the channel for communication was open again.

::Had a nice sleep?:: Hiccup tried to joke but he knew his mind was racing.

::I was hardly sleeping,: _Toothless scoffed. _ ::Though I would thank your friend for making me fly so low the whole time, that takes so much more control than gliding higher above._

:::Sorry, I tried to-:

_:::It doesn't matter now.::: _Toothless cut him off. _:::What are the orders now to retrieve the other female's dragon?::_

_:::Just make sure things are safe for her to steal, I guess.:::

-

"Albar!" Hiccup heard Asha call to him and he turned. "Have Alastair get on with you while Lashmed and I start checking the interior. Don't get picky just have Toothless take out anyone who might be in the way."

Toothless extended an arm down and Alastair grabbed on, swinging upwards and landing almost perfectly on the saddle. Hiccup grabbed her side just to make sure she was on properly but the surprises in how agile Alastair was continued to impress Hiccup now that they were outside the confines of the palace.

"You okay?" Alastair asked immediately.

"Yeah."

"You sure?"

"Yes."

"Youâ€" "

"Alastair! You're the one who ran for almost six hours after being captured, not me."

"Okay, okay, just making sure. How about you Toothless?" Alastair leaned forward, every heavy breath that puffed against Hiccup's skin just reminding him that she was coming off running for so long and still expecting to perform at top shape, and here he was worrying he couldn't do it when he had been sitting on his butt the whole time.

Toothless, as well, having flown at an exhausting elevation, and now being expected to attack humans.

:::Tell her that I'm fine despite being a little annoyed at how many humans I have to deal with in such a short amount of time.::

_Toothless retorted, puffing out some smoke from his nostrils

"He'sâ€" Hiccup began but Alastair was already chiming in.

"He looks annoyed." Alastair cocked her head to the side and Hiccup smiled. Alastair hadn't heard what Toothless had said, but she was getting better at reading him. She pet Toothless's side gently before tucking Nimfir's peaking head back into her tunic. "Everything will be fine, we just have to get through one more night of insanity and we should be good."

"Easier said than done." Hiccup muttered to himself but it didn't matter all the same when he looked below and saw the slavery's entrance swooping below them.

A horn sounded as soon as they past the gates, and Hiccup's injured leg began to twinge as they passed over the dragon cages to the field's fences where he had been stabbed.

:::Human from last night is back:::

::Save us!:::

:::New human is back!:::

Hiccup heard the other enslaved dragons as they flew and he squeezed his eyes shut. _Don't do anything that's not part of the plan, _he told himself.

_Don't do anything that's not part of the plan, _he said again, _chanted _it.

_:::Excuse me, I'm over here.::: _Hiccup and Toothless both heard and jolted up, Hiccup had only heard Stormfly speak once but he knew that no one else had as snippy a tone as her. He and Toothless pulled up and flapped above the fences, looking around.

"What are you doing?" Alastair pulled at his shirt. "We're gonna get shot down if we stay in one place."

"I heard Stormfly." Hiccup said.

_:::Where are you?::: _He asked.

_:::In these filthy cages behind you.::: _She replied.

"Hiccup, Camicazi's job is to get Stormfly, ours is to take out the obstacles outside." Alastair tugged at him again and pointed to the general direction the horn blowing was coming from. More torches were ignited in around the courtyards of the main estate and Hiccup snapped out of his daze.

_:::Camicazi is coming for you, hang tight.::: _Hiccup told Stormfly before they continued to fly away. Knowing all too well that Alastair was right. Camicazi has set a plan and even if he thought it would be easier for him to go get Stormfly, he was going to actually listen to orders this time.

_:::I don't know what hanging tightly meansâ€|.::: _Stormfly muttered, seeming confused and saddened by being left.

"We get the guy who's guarding the fields first." Hiccup said. "He's the one who's sounding the horn". He let out a snide grin when he noticed down below that the man was the same he had encountered the previous night, though his right arm was in a sling after Hiccup had stabbed him before he left.

_:::Toothless.::: _Hiccup started, though he could already feel the annoyance coming from the night fury as he sucked back his fire, the purple glow coming from his mouth. The saddle got warm just as it always did before Toothless shot at something. _:::Try aiming at something nearby just to knock him out. He's already injured.::: _Hiccup offered and Toothless gave a nod before shooting at the shed behind the man, it exploded and the wooden planks from the shed jutted across the field. The man was good enough, despite his age, to

dodge most of them but he dropped his horn. Toothless fired another shot, close to the man's feet and he was thrown back, a broken plank still attached to the remaining structure of the house landing right at his back and he landed.

Hiccup and Alastair both winced at the crunching sound that was made at the impact but circled around nonetheless.

"Good call on knowing where the horn was coming from." Alastair told him.

"Well I was here just last night." Hiccup smiled, trying to wrangle in the shiver of pride that welled in his chest at the praise

"It'll be quicker if I drop down and try to take out some of the guards that are coming up from the courtyard." Alastair mentioned. Looking at a few of them hopping over the fence into the fields—some with arrows, some with swords—to get at Toothless. Though it was a lot less than either of them expected, Hiccup supposed it was thanks to whatever management Asha and Lashmed were doing inside. "You and Toothless can shoot down anyone I don't—" "

"No, you stay here, Alastair." Hiccup put a hand at her side, sitting her back down when she was already motioning to get up from the saddle. He and Toothless swooped down another hot wave ran through the saddle as Toothless shot at the feet of the guards. It was too close of a call and Hiccup saw their pants and boots ignite. Some of them tried to put the flames out, others rolled on the ground, and some completely went into flames. He turned his head away at the screams and Toothless looked forward, his expression deadpan though the thrusting pain at the dragon's chest was something even Hiccup felt.

He clutched his tunic and let his eyes fall for a fraction of a second before his eyelids were filled with red. A light coming towards him when he looked up and saw a flaming arrow being shot off from one of the estate's balconies. Toothless was already trying to dodge but Hiccup messed up his footing, the jolt of the sudden arrow halting his foot and making him shift into the wrong position. The controls of the tail locked at his and Toothless's opposing movements and he felt the heat graze his skin but it didn't touch.

It was Alastair's scream that made him realize that they were falling, and Alastair's tunic was set ablaze.

She toppled to the ground and jammed her hand in the ground the second she stopped rolling, picking up a fistful of dirt and dumping it onto her sleeve to snuff out the fire before it could spread. Nimfir scurried out of her shirt and trembled on the ground while Hiccup fumbled to detach himself from Toothless's saddle. The night fury tried to get his balance back. Alastair, though, was already on her feet again, a charred tunic sleeve but seemingly unharmed.

She ripped out a sword that she had managed to swipe from one of the guards they buried back in the flats and stood in front of them as the few guards that weren't burned ran towards them. She was only in combat with about three men but as soon as Hiccup looked over he winced, taking out his swords knowing that it was his job to be protecting Alastair but his legs locked, his hands trembled. He only

wished he had the rage he did back at the palace when he so easily almost too easily stabbed those two men guarding the prison without a second thought.

He felt Toothless's teeth pulling at his shirt to sit.

:::Don't do anything foolish. Toothless warned him.

Hiccup looked between Alastair and Toothless, biting down hard on his bottom lip before turning his foot forward.

_:::Sorry but I have to::: _He began turning when he heard the clang of swords clashing, metal ripping through air and landing in the ground with a powerful sink. Alastair lost her sword and the vulnerable look on her face was something Hiccup never wanted to ever see her make.

"Don't touch my brother!" Hiccup screamed, running forward on an angry high. He felt it, that rage, that fear of losing something, of it being his fault for being so weak. The rage brewed a strength that burned his skin and propelled his legs despite his injury. It scared him to be so out of control but he went with it, knowing he'd do what he needed to with it more so than without it.

He could barely see the movements of the other men but somehow he blocked their swords, like somehow everything slowed down but at the same time was going at the speed of light with his rapid breaths and fire burning in his consciousness.

He felt tears running down his face with every sword he blocked and every battle cry he screamed before he heard that same clang but this time, it was the other man's sword, it flew over their heads, back behind him which he left for Toothless to guard and just as quickly as the other men tried to secure him after that move, he got rid of their swords as well.

Hiccup stepped on one man's stomach with his left foot, another's knee with his right, and pointed one of his swords to the neck of the last man.

He saw horror, fear for life, pleading and begging in his eyes but something within Hiccup didn't turn off his rage. Like all the past days, no, past years of feeling useless were welling up within him.

"_It's not like we're competing in some blood hunt" _he remembered Camicazi saying earlier that afternoon. And his hand shook, the seconds feeling like hours while his mind raced. He felt it, a lust within him to take out his aggressions by spilling someone else's blood. It made his stomach churn but his senses opened up, leaving even the slightest wind to send his entire skeleton shivering.

"_Either finish the job cleanly, or don't start it" _he also remembered Camicazi saying and that was the last thing he thought before something shut off within him.

He heard the begs of the man at his sword point, the other pained groans of the other men and his boots crushed into their bones. Somewhere deep behind his brain he thought he heard Alastair telling

him something but his ears closed off, his eyes went dark and tunneled, and his body moved on its own.

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All at once it was like a jolt of consciousness came back to him and he felt rough hands shaking him.

"Hic-Albar, Albar!" Alastair's voice, Hiccup recognized.

:::Welcome back, you know it worries me when your mind shuts off, like that.:: _Toothless spoke as well, and he felt a dragon's nose nudge his side, a warm, scaly body pressing into his back for support. But Hiccup didn't lose notice of the tense atmosphere the dragon emitted. There was a tenderness a fear of loss, and even though Toothless tried to sound calm and like nothing was wrong there was that same fear Toothless always seemed to have. Not of losing him but of him, of him personally.

_:::Whaâ€|whatâ€|happenedâ€|?::: _Hiccup mumbled inwardly, trying to get his faculties up to par. He swallowed when he realized that everyone was there. Alastair, Toothless, Nimfir, Asha and Lashmed, even Camicazi and a clearly rescued Stormfly, Hookfang, Ruffnutâ€|_everyone._

Had he screwed everything up again?

He felt a slap on his back, but it was light, shaky and Camicazi leaned down to him.

"Hey stupid, I told you to protect your brother not mercilessly hack up three people and then faint in their blood." She told him, but her voice was anything but it's usually quip. "You almost gave your brother a heart attack."

Hiccup's eyes widened, looking down at his hands that were caked over in dry blood, once he realized what it was he felt it everywhere. Blood was on his face, in his hair, on his pants, his boots. Everywhere but his shirt which, now that he looked at itâ€"the burnt left sleeve, and oversized fitâ€"wasn't his, it was Alastair's.

Alastair held his tunic over her shoulder while she had her undershirt on, chest flat enough due to her bindings but still, a risk. It only took one good breeze for his shirt to waft up from behind her back for him to see that it was stained, almost bathed, in blood.

He held a hand over his mouth, a sting in his throat threatening to hurl up.

"I-Iâ€|" he choked out but he swallowed his words when he felt Camicazi throw her arms around him.

"Idiot!" Cami yelled, but her entire body was shaking while she held him. "I told you this wasn't a blood hunt, Albar, I told you not toâ€""

"Sorry." Hiccup said, reaching a weak hand up to clutch her shirt

while he looked around. Everyone looked somber, worn out, and worried. He caught a glimpse of Alastair's eyes while she looked down at him. He couldn't really put a name to the emotion of her face but she looked sad, scared, worried, and yet there was solemn acceptance within her.

"Don't lose yourself like that." Camicazi said as she slowly pulled away, her eyes shined but there was no evidence that tears had fallen. "You're still a kid, don't get your body count too high so early." Her tone was a little softer, lighter, more joking, but that thick emotion underlined her last few words to him. "Don't!" she said, breathy and softly just to him, "be like me."

"Trust me," Hookfang said, walking forward a bit while slinging her swords over her shoulder. Her own shirt was stained with blood, though it was normal for her. "Once you start," she continued, "you can't go back."

Hiccup nodded, not sure if he agreed or even what he should do but he submitted because doing so usually meant something better for him.

"We should move quickly." Asha interrupted. "I'm sure the estate has a least one last wave of guards left to fight us off."

Hiccup looked around. They were deep back in the fields of the estate, farther back than he had gone on their first run there.

"Alright, let's get mounted quickly, there's two dragons and no time to be picky." Camicazi stood, the leader within her returning in a strong command.

"Well then, I guess this is our stop." Ruffnut stepped back, Thuggory and Furfoot staying by her side.

"Wait, what?" Alastair stepped forward towards them. "You don't have to leave now it's too dangerous."

"Yeah, you've more than proved at least passable if you want to travel with us for a little while." Camicazi shrugged.

"No thanks, our goal is to do the rescuing, not be rescued." Ruffnut smiled to herself. "We're gonna stay behind and get captured again."

"But!" Alastair started to object but Hiccup saw her shoulders fall, her eyes lid and a sad smile stretch her lips before holding out an arm.

Ruffnut gripped it tightly and returned her grin.

"If Roman prison is where you're trying to go, then just bring Tuffnut back, alright?"

"Yeah, definitely, but you^{re} you take care Asta!" Ruffnut stopped herself closing her lips tightly before speaking again. "Alastair," she landed on.

Alastair nodded, firm and reassuring.

"Hey, you over there." Ruffnut looked over at Hiccup and he sprang up, regretting his motions with the dizziness he felt but was supported by Toothless's forehead under his elbow. "Take care of your brother, okay?"

"Um, y-yeah!" Hiccup bobbed his head in the most convincing nod he could despite the fact that everything around him was still hazy.

And with a heroic wave of her hand Alastair's friend Ruffnut retreated back to the torch lit dragon slavery to be captured once again.

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The morning was welcomed with bright yellows and blues over what seemed like a red night to Astrid.

The chill in the air gave her goose bumps over her barred skin since Hiccup still wore her tunic. Her undershirt flapped around as she hoped no one was paying too close attention to the barest suggestion of bindings being underneath.

"Position three." Hiccup told her with a yawn.

"Which one was that, again?" She bit her lip.

"Move your foot all the way back."

"Right." She did so, hearing two clicks and Toothless went a little more upwards, catching the current before she moved her foot back to the leveled position and the glided once again.

Astrid was the one flying Toothless now, opting to do so while Hiccup recovered from his ordeal. He leaned against her back, lazily giving out orders of how to fly Toothless and what positions her foot needed to be in to bank left or right or go upwards. She was getting a little more used to flying—“at least more so than when she had to do it back on Berk during the raid”—but she wished she wasn't flying Toothless because Hiccup was too drained from _murdering _just a few hours prior.

She had never seen him so angry and out of control. She had thrown up at one point just watching him as he ripped his sword through their flesh and just... didn't stop... no matter how many times she called to him. His eyes had been hollow, his movements doll-like and it scared her.

That w_asn't _Hiccup, she didn't know who that was, but all she knew is she never wanted to see whoever that was ever again.

As if the fears she had of being left behind the previous afternoon were enough to shake her up now she had to deal with a whole new wave of fear that she felt towards this new side, no, this _other person _that seemed to live within Hiccup.

She only wished she had felt some kind of comfort in the whole situation being over and them finally heading to meet the others on the Bog's ship after running on almost two days of no food or sleep

but her mind was spinning too much.

So she tried to focus on happier things, like Ruffnut. As odd as it was, even in her going back to be captured she was getting all the more closer to her goal.

At least one of them was.

But, boy, did Ruffnut have quite a tale as to how she got there.

**The return of those 8,000+ chapters. I basically combined two chapters cause I refused to have an "Alike and Agile, part 5".
**

Also, if it wasn't obvious enough, the main group is gonna take a brief break because next chapter is a flashback chapter showing Ruffnut's journey to where she is now. So you get to learn more about Thuggory and Furfoot because they've mostly just been background up until now.

Review Responses:

Thank you, TheDelta724, Guest, and AliceCullen3 for reviewing chapter 22!

Six samurai of dragon order: Yeah, I don't **_always **_**catch every wrong pronoun. I often wonder why I picked such a hard concept cause sometimes even I forgot that Astrid was a boy for a long period to Hiccup so use male pronouns, and now whenever someone else is talking to Hiccup he's Albar. Complicated stuff, I should probably proofread more but I still won't catch everything.**

**Q-A the Authoress: Welllllll, she's still not part of the main group, but what she's been up to is coming up next chapter, so there's that. **

SharKohen: I'm so glad you like the story so far, It's kinda tricky meshing everything together but I'm having a blast doing it so I'm glad it's coming off well. Dealing with the three main character's internal problems is one of my favorite things about writing this story and it only gets more intense as it progresses, we've barely scratched the surface!

**TheShadoWWarrior: Ah, yeah, good ol grammarâ€|my worst enemy.
**

**Kitty.0: Yeah, Camicazi demands but deserves all the respect she gets. She a fun character to get into once her motivations come to the forefront. **

G: Well I don't know if almost two months later is "soon" but it's a lot shorter than my last break.

**HiccupHaddockIII: Thank you so much for such a nice review! I'm glad you like the story that much. And you'll get to see all of Ruffnut's current story in the next chapter, it took a while but what she's been up to while Astrid has been getting into all her stuff will be revealed. And haha, it seems quite a few people were up reading this story into the wee hours of the night, which is cool

butâ€|get some sleep hehe.**

**Waveringshadow: Whoa, way to review so many chapters! I honestly can't wait until who the dragon heart is is revealed, cause there are two ways people's reactions can go and each one is going to be entertaining (well for me haha). And Astrid's real name being a plot pointâ€|I guess you'll have to wait but I'd say more of a character point than anything else. **

**Noctus Fury: Yeah, I'm sorry for leaving this story for so long, but I had to get back into the swing of it. I might be gone for a long time but never forever. And Hiccup and Toothless's growing relationship is the slowest of the bunch but probably the most carefully written, it's so fragile which will be touched on later. And well, Hiccup and Camicazi's relationshipâ€"like a lot of the relationships in this storyâ€"are easily written but not as easily defined. I'd kinda just take it at face value as a bond and let you determine what category to put it under. Astrid may or may not have something to be jealous over but that doesn't necessarily mean it's a romantic jealousy. And everyone's Ruffnut questions will be answered next chapter. **

Next Chapter: Rune and Ready

End
file.